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Why do national NGOs go where they go?

The case of Yemen

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FIRST DRAFT

-Not for quotation-



Introduction

Aid effectiveness is without a doubt the most central element in the ongoing discussion on development cooperation. Although this discussion will certainly continue for a long time, it is interesting to see that the search for ‘impediments to aid effectiveness’ has been broadened substantially when in the 2000s donors finally and openly admitted that they also played a role in making aid ineffective. As such, the Paris Declaration of 2005 (and the subsequent declarations of Accra of 2008 and Busan in 2011 – see: OECD 2005; OECD 2008; OECD 2011) are as much a search for more effective aid as a way of saying that aid effectiveness (of better the lack thereof) is due to elements on both the donor and recipients side.

One of the main problems in reaching effective aid concerns the idea of donor proliferation (little aid from many donors to many countries) and sector fragmentation (little aid spread over many projects, programmes or sectors) (Schulpen et al. 2011). Both proliferation and fragmentation are then seen leading to high transaction costs and in effect to ineffective aid. The ‘Paris sequence’ is then largely based on finding solutions to the problems associated with an increasing number of actors providing piecemeal assistance to a large number of recipients. These declarations and the underlying principles call for a division of labour between development actors. Although all of this sounds quite logical, there are at least three problems with this discussion (Habraken, et al 2014): (1) the largest part of the studies are restricted to determining cross-country allocation patterns (generally by making a distinction between needs (e.g., poverty levels), merits (e.g., democracy) and self-interest (e.g., trade) drivers (Hoeffler & Outram 2008) but pay scant (if any) attention to in-country patterns; (2) it is largely restricted to the usual suspects of bilateral and multilateral agencies thus leaving out many new development actors (such as the NGOs) and (3) Southern players (i.e., Local NGOs) are not part of this effectiveness/proliferation/fragmentation debate.

There are few studies which have tried to mitigate the aforementioned issues by looking into in-country allocations of (Southern or Local) NGOs. Notable exceptions are the study by Brass (2012) looking into geographical allocation patterns of local NGOs in Kenya and the one by Habraken et al. (2014) also focusing on Kenya and essentially revisiting Brass’ study but including international NGOs in the equation. Both studies are based on the idea that there are three possible explanations for in-country allocations of LNGOs. ‘The first (“saintly”) states that NGOs “locate their projects where recipient need is very great”, the second (“self-serving”) that they work where the NGO (or NGO workers) have “convenient access to goods and services”, and the third (“political”) that they go where “powerful politicians help through their patronage networks”’(Habraken et al. 2014:2).

Both studies showed that saintly and self-serving reasons prevail, while ‘political pressures do not appear to influence NGO locations in Kenya’ (Brass 2012: 393). Habraken et al. (2014) add that LNGOs and INGOs tend to follow each other, leading to herding behaviour (also see Koch 2009; Fruttero & Gauri 2005). A possible explanation might be that LNGOs follow INGOs as the latter is considered a large source of funding. On the contrary, one could also argue that INGOs follow LNGOs as they seek local partner organisations to carry out their programme implementation (Habraken et al. 2014: 9).

What holds for Kenya naturally does not have to hold for another country as NGO sectors and political, economic and social circumstances differ. Here, we set out to revisit the study of

Brass and Habraken et al. by looking into the allocation patterns of local NGOs in Yemen. What then are the driving forces of the geographical allocation patterns of Yemeni NGOs? Put differently: why do local NGOs in Yemen go where they go? We follow the same logic and structure of both Kenya studies using data on NGO placement in Yemen for 2013 and data from 2008 for our independent variables (or the latest data available – see further under ‘methodology’). We include international NGOs (INGOs) as an additional explanatory factor as was done in Habraken et al. (2014). In doing so, we add to our understanding of NGO allocations, recognise NGOs as important players in the field of development (cooperation) and contribute to a refined insight into the ongoing fragmentation and proliferation discussion.

This paper begins with a brief overview of the Yemeni context focusing particularly on political change and the political/administrative structure of the country. This is followed by an overview of LNGOs (and partly INGOs) active in Yemen and our methodology (including a discussion of data, its limitations, hypotheses and our methodological approach. After the analysis we end our paper with some preliminary conclusions and discussions.¹

1. Yemen: political change and structure

With the unification of North and South Yemen in 1990, the Republic of Yemen (RoY) inherited several political, economic and social challenges in part owing to differences between the previous socialist regime in the South and capitalist regime in the North. The integration of political, economic and administrative institutions strengthened these challenges and negatively affected the development, stability and security of the country (Elayah 2008). Unification thus brought no end to unstable political affairs and power struggles in this country ‘dominated by elite factions manipulating shifting groups of clients based on tribal or sectarian loyalties’(Manea 2012: 1).

(Violent) power struggles have since then dominated the political landscape of Yemen. This is clear already in 1994 when the South declared its secession from the North but the Southern political elite were then defeated in a short civil war led by the former ruling party of the North (General People’s Congress – GPC – under the leadership of Ali Abdullah Saleh – former president of North Yemen and president of the combined Yemen since unification in 1990) in a strategic partnership with the emerging political Islam party. The strategic partnership was broken up after the 1997 election when GPC won the absolute majority in parliament. In 2000, the opposition parties (e.g., Muslim Brotherhood Party, Yemeni Socialist Party, Unionist Nasserite Party, Baath Party, Union of Popular Forces Party), which had been holding coalition talks since the 1997 election, formed the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP). The establishment of the JMP was a direct reaction to the adoption of a new political approach by GPC in which president Saleh presented his son as his successor. Although Saleh and his ruling party (again) won the majority in the parliament elections held in 2003, it seemed that the staunch support of his immediate clan and tribal allies started to falter (Manea 2012: 1).

The 2003 parliamentary election were at the same time the last to have been held in the country up to now (although there have been presidential elections in 2006 and 2012 and

¹ We grateful acknowledge assistance by Pieter van Groenestijn in analysing the data on NGO placement for this paper.

local elections in 2006). Ever since then, Yemen has been struggling with one power struggle after another. Four of these have dominated the political arena in the 21st century: (1) the Houthi resistance movement in the city of Sadaah starting in 2004, where Shia Zaydi revivalists struggled with the Government on mainly regional economic issues; (2) the decrease of power of the President Saleh and the rise of the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) led by the Muslim Brotherhood party (Islam party) under General Ali Mohsen al-Amar (ex-second man of Yemen); (3) the rise of the Southern Movement from 2007 on, a populist protest movement where social justice against Northern Yemen and local autonomy are the main denominators and which has become increasingly more radical – ultimately calling for secession from Northern Yemen; and (4) the Yemen Arab Spring in early 2011 as an emancipatory movement articulated by massive demonstrations involving hundreds of thousands of pro-democracy protesters, youth, civil society, women and unemployed demanding equitable employment, access to services, greater autonomy, and resolution of other grievances. 'This volatile mix of grievances and the engagement not only of youth and civil society–dominated protestors but also of other key power brokers pushed Yemen closer to the brink of becoming a failed state' (Gaston, 2014: 2).

International concern that growing instability would leave Yemen exposed to al-Qaeda and other extremist organisations resulted in November 2011 in a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Pact signed by the European Union, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Countries, United Kingdom and United States, in which the conflicting Yemeni parties were persuaded to enter peace talks. The Pact was established for a two-year period of political transition under process of the National Dialogue Conference (NDC). However, on March 4, 2015, Houthi militants raided the NDC Secretariat in Sana'a, therewith suspending its activities. This act of violence was perhaps the most tangible sign that the broad national dialogue failed to set Yemen on a pathway out of conflict and nudge it towards a citizen engagement process to build a more just, equitable and prosperous Yemen. Instead, Yemen has currently plunged back into full-blown civil strife. This even became a regional conflict in March 2015, when Saudi Arabia (spearheading a coalition of nine Arab States) began carrying out airstrikes in neighbouring Yemen in order to demolish the power of the Houthi movement.

Administrative structure

The Republic of Yemen is divided in 21 governorates (including the city of Sana'a which has a status comparable to a governorate). These governorates form the first local-level administrative unit. Each governorate is in turn divided in directorates (333 in total) subdivided again in urban (cities, districts and neighbourhoods) and rural (sub-directorates, villages and camps) sub-divisions (see Table 1 for an overview of governorates and the number of directorates per governorate). The highest-level administrator in a governorate is the governor appointed by the president.

The governorate is therefore an administrative, not a political unit, though it overlaps with several sub-governorate political units (i.e., directorates). In principle, each directorate votes for its own Member of Parliament (MP) although some directorates are joined in case of a low population. The last parliamentary elections were held in 2003. Next to these parliamentary elections, there are local council elections at directorate level, the last of which was held in 2006.

Table 1. The national and sub-administrative division in Yemen

Governorates	# Directorates	Governorates	# Directorates
Ibb	20	Sa'adah	15
Abyan	11	Sana'a	16
Sana'a City	10	Aden	8
Al-Baida	20	Laheg	15
Taiz	23	Mareb	14
Al-Jawf	12	Al-Mahweet	9
Hajjah	31	Al-Maharah	9
Al-Hodeidah	26	Amran	20
Hadramout	30	Al-Daleh	9
Dhamar	12	Reymah	6
Shabwah	17	Total	333

Source: Yemen COS, 2013

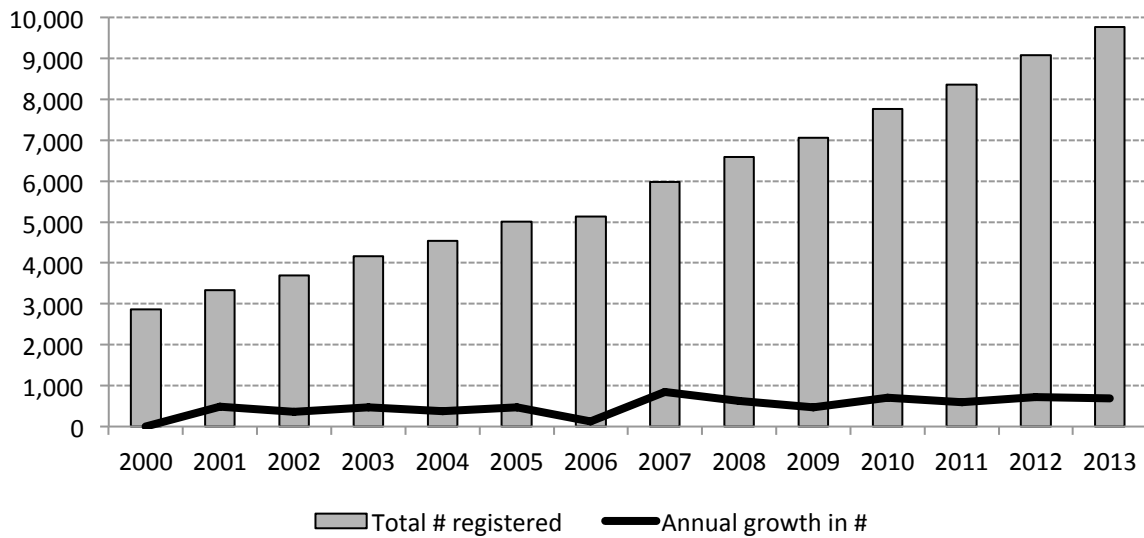
2. LNGOs and INGOs in Yemen

As part of its strive towards economic and political reforms since 1998, and in close cooperation with the World Bank (Elbayar 2005: 35), the Yemeni government in 2001 passed the Law on Associations and Foundations (Law 1) which has subsequently been heralded as 'the most enabling law governing civil society organisations (CSOs) in the Arabian peninsula' (ICNL 2015). Although there are some restrictions the Law in general provides for freedom of association, for organisations to operate with minimal government interference and for no legal barriers to receiving foreign funding (although such funding should be reported). Interestingly, the 'NGO Law' leaves it up to the associations and foundations (whether local or international ones) to register or not. Thousands of such organisations since then have indeed registered but thousands have also chosen not to. In 2014, the World Bank stated that next to the then 8,317 registered CSOs there were 'more than 6,000 other CSOs [...] estimated to be operating without registration'. The total number of the non-governmental or civil society organisations in Yemen is said to have reached about 15,000 in 2015 of which around 40% or more are not officially registered (World Bank 2014; UNDP 2014).

Since passing Law 1, the number of registered local NGOs (LNGOs) has increased substantially reaching nearly 10,000 at the end of 2013. Between 2000 and 2013, each year on average an additional 531 CSOs registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MoSAL) (also see Figure 1 showing the increase in number of registered organisations). At the same time, a total of 105 International NGOs (INGO) were registered with the NGO Bureau in 2013.

These numbers already show that civil society in Yemen is by no means small. Whereas the World Bank (2014: ix) may be correct in stating that NGOs 'in Yemen are among the most vibrant and dynamic in the Middle East and North Africa (MNA) region', it is absolutely clear that the NGO sector is quite diverse. This diversity, for instance, becomes clear when looking at the types of NGOs distinguished by the Yemeni government (notwithstanding that the exact difference between these types is not always entirely clear).

Figure 1 An increasing number of local CSOs registered (2000-2013)



Source: own calculations based on the data of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL) in Yemen

Law 1 of 2001 principally distinguishes between associations and foundations to which unions ('an entity that consists of Associations and/or Foundations' – World Bank 2013: 45). Whereas foundations can be established 'by one or more natural or legal person' and their main aim by definition is to undertake 'a public benefit function', (popular) associations can only be established 'by natural persons the least number of which is 21 persons at the time of application for the establishment and 41 persons at the constituent meeting' (GoY 2001). In contrast to foundations, associations can also have a 'common benefit for a specific social group'. The same rules as for associations applies to unions which are either sector-oriented (i.e., unions consisting of associations and foundations having 'the same typology and work in the same field at the governorate or national levels') or geographically-based (i.e., unions consisting of 'all the foundations and associations in the same governorate, regardless of their scope of work') (World Bank 2013: 13, 45).

Table 2 Total number of organisations per type – absolute numbers and in % total (N=9.773) (2013)

Type of the NGOs	Abs. numbers	in % total
Charitable organisation	3,255	33.3%
Development organisations	3,125	32.0%
Social & humanitarian institutions	2,331	23.9%
Cultural organisations	329	3.4%
Professional and agricultural organisations	289	3.0%
Cultural and media forums	149	1.5%
General unions	139	1.4%
Scientific organisations	79	0.8%
Clubs	35	0.4%
Friendships organisations	29	0.3%
Brotherhood organisations	13	0.1%

Source: own calculations based on the data of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL) in Yemen.

Although this sounds quite clear, in reality a large number of different types of associations are distinguished as Table 2 clearly shows. For some of these additional procedures have been established. Cultural organisations and clubs, for instance, need the permission of the Ministry of Culture for their registration, whereas media forums need the same from the Ministry of Media. At the same time, some possible associations (such as networks) are not able to register at all ‘due to the fact that there is no “network” classification available or provisions to cover their activity in the current NGO registration law’ (*ibid*: 7). Together with the often long period needed to register, these additional demands and exclusions undoubtedly contribute to the fact that large numbers of active NGOs are not registered at all.

The same kind of diversity as seen with regard to types of NGOs is clear when looking at the sectoral focus of LNGOs. Here a total of 28 different sectors are distinguished with the largest part of LNGOs not restricting itself to one sector only. In fact, they might cover up to ten different ones. Still, a few sectors clearly stand out and these do not come as a surprise as they seem to form the ‘traditional’ sectors for the NGO community worldwide. So, as Table 3 shows, gender equality and empowerment of women (60% of LNGOs claim to be working in this sector), education (55%), poverty reduction (54%), human rights (49%) and advocacy (48%) are the most important ones. This is then followed by sectors reflecting important themes in the field of development and security in Yemen such as governance and rule of law (38%) and peace building (34%). More economic sectors such as fisheries (2%) and agriculture (7%) attract only a relatively small part of LNGOs despite a 2,000 km long coastline and an economic dependence on traditional agriculture.

Table 3 LNGOs and sectors (N= 8,317) (2012)

Sector	% of NGOs	Sector	% of NGOs
Gender equality/Empowerment	60%	Environment	19%
Education	55%	Minorities	17%
Poverty Reduction	54%	Urban Areas Development	15%
Human Rights	49%	Microfinance	15%
Advocacy	48%	Persons with Disabilities	14%
Governance and Rule of Law	38%	Natural Resources Management	10%
Peace Building	34%	Employment & Labour Issues	10%
Health & Nutrition (Including HIV)	32%	Agriculture and food security	7%
Entrepreneurship	23%	Migration	5%
Rural Areas Development	22%	Fisheries	2%
Emergency & Crisis Prevention	20%		

Source: World Bank 2014

Although not entirely comparable, it should perhaps equally not be surprising that the sectoral focus of INGOs shows important similarities and differences with that of LNGOs (see Table 4). Apart from the fact that also INGOs tend to cover large numbers of sectors, gender equality and empowerment (42% of INGOs state working in this sector) is again in the top. With INGOs, however, health (& HIV) comes first. A smaller percentage of INGOs also focuses on such political sectors as human rights (15% against 49% for LNGOs).

Table 4 INGOs and sectors (N=105) (2013)

Sector	% of INGOs	Sector	% of INGOs
Health & HIV	48%	Water and Sanitation	15%
Gender equality / Empowerment	42%	Capacity Building	15%
Humanitarian Aid / Crisis Prevention	41%	Human Rights	15%
Rural and Urban Areas Development	34%	Livelihood	14%
Education	28%	Democratisation and Governance	14%
Save Children	24%	Agriculture and food security	11%
Poverty Reduction	22%	Construction	9%
Social Protraction	20%		

Source: own calculations based on INGO data from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL) in Yemen.

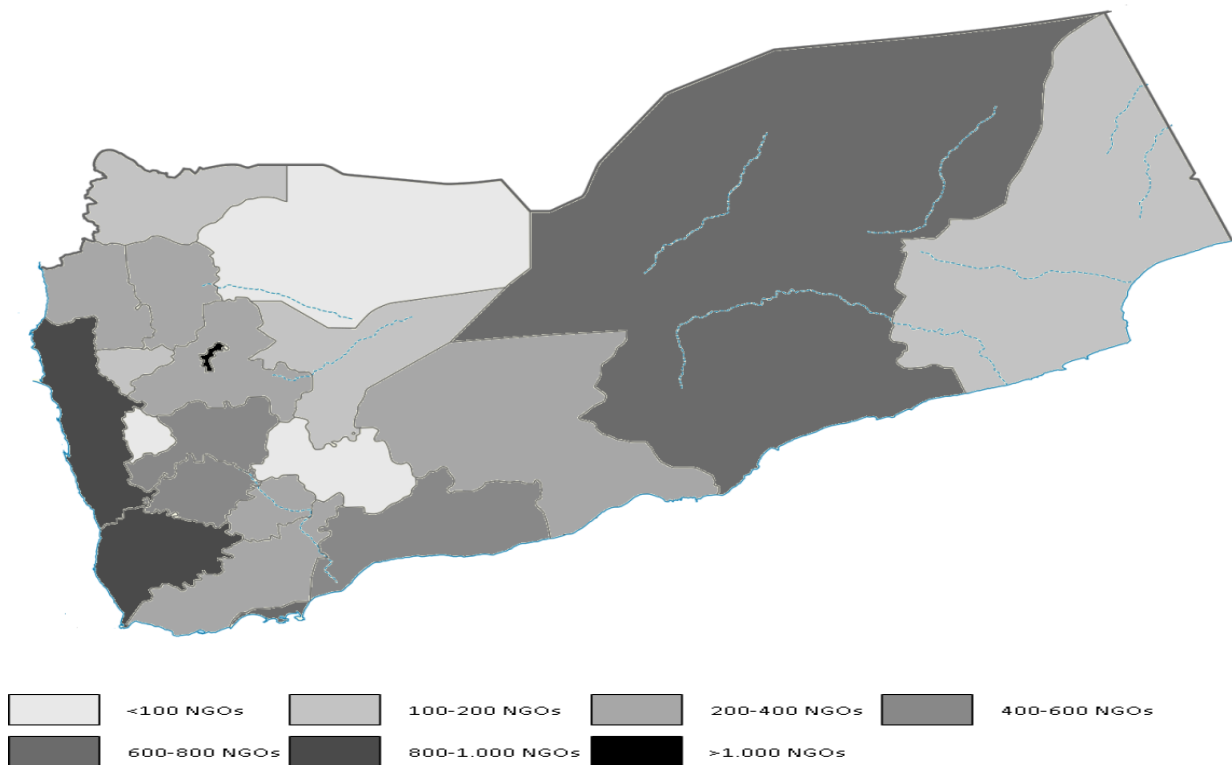
For now, perhaps the most interesting sign of the high diversity in the NGO-sector in Yemen relates to the geographical distribution. Some governorates in Yemen harbour substantially more NGOs than others and have also seen a substantially bigger increase over the years. Not surprisingly, a large part of NGO's (2,354 or 24.1%) has its headquarter in the capital Sana'a city, whereas the governorates of Reymah, Al-Baida and Al-Jawf each only covers around 1% of registered NGOs. Table 5 and Figure 2 provide an overview showing how many LNGOs have their headquarter in which governorate.

Table 5 LNGOs active in Yemen and Governorates (N=9,773) (2013) – date of establishment / registration

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Ibb	126	151	171	202	234	269	281	311	367	401	437	461	489	552
Abyan	174	212	226	256	291	337	352	393	436	468	507	507	511	537
Sana'a City	532	612	663	737	790	964	1051	1234	1368	1486	1716	1864	2138	2354
Al-Baida	38	49	56	61	65	71	73	81	85	90	93	93	93	99
Taiz	327	379	431	460	477	499	504	548	579	614	648	715	769	802
Al-Jawf	19	23	32	44	50	51	52	56	63	64	71	75	77	94
Hajjah	53	62	78	88	110	148	185	208	248	266	299	313	338	372
Al-Hodeidah	217	297	349	386	462	481	484	542	626	696	768	831	913	913
Hadramout	208	238	260	291	320	351	357	412	445	478	525	569	626	715
Dhamar	106	119	124	133	142	147	148	197	240	247	289	346	382	416
Shabwah	95	101	109	116	126	138	154	177	193	200	220	220	228	228
Sa'adah	49	59	66	71	77	80	86	90	94	97	106	132	143	152
Sana'a	99	116	126	139	153	176	196	236	253	266	293	323	340	361
Aden	366	389	412	430	451	458	469	489	497	514	526	546	594	673
Laheg	171	200	220	238	259	280	305	315	337	347	351	362	376	393
Mareb	28	32	40	44	53	60	65	75	84	89	100	110	119	136
Al-Mahweet	42	55	64	78	95	109	115	126	126	130	136	143	147	147
Al-Maharah	44	53	58	61	71	72	73	77	82	85	88	93	102	105
Amran	65	76	85	96	120	165	176	200	224	229	246	258	276	294
Al-Daleh	62	73	79	87	97	116	126	155	193	233	283	329	347	350
Reymah	38	41	43	46	47	51	52	55	56	58	63	67	74	80
Total	2859	3337	3692	4160	4532	5005	5128	5977	6596	7058	7765	8357	9082	9773

Source: own calculations based on INGO data from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (MOSAL) in Yemen.

Figure 2 National NGOs registered per governorate (2013)



Notwithstanding that a World Bank survey of 2013 in the major five governorates found that 37% of the registered LNGOs reported to ‘work in more than one governorate in Yemen’ (World Bank 2013: 38), lack of data means we have to take the headquarter of LNGOs as an indication where these LNGOs work. In effect, all 9.773 LNGOs included here are seen as being active only in the governorate in which they are registered. For the 105 INGOs included here more detailed information is available showing that many are active in more than one governorate. In fact, 54 of them (49.5%) reportedly is active in all 21 governorates in Yemen, whereas the remaining ones are active in anything between one and six governorates. Looking at individual governorates shows that the differences in number of active INGOs is relatively small. Although Aden, Sana’a city, Taiz, Abyan and Hadramout cover the largest number with between 61 and 67 active INGOs, the governorates ranking bottom (such as Mareb, Shabwah and Haijah) still cover 54 INGOs.

3. Methodology

For our analysis we take the aggregate number of NGOs per governorate in 2013 as the dependent variable. Data comes from the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour and provides the most comprehensive and annually updated information on the number of NGOs. Still, this data is not flawless for two reasons already mentioned. First of all because it does not include information about the locations (at governorate level) where NGOs actually work. Capacity problems at the Ministry (and its local offices) is undoubtedly contributing to this flaw in data although NGOs have been removed from the list over the years because they were no longer active. Secondly, the data only include registered NGOs thus leaving out a large number of local NGOs which, for whatever reason, did not officially register.

For independent variables we stick to the saintly, self-serving and political placement explanations developed by Brass (2012). In determining the predictors for each of these categories, we follow Brass as much as possible but deviate where constraints in data availability so required (also see Box 1). We add, however, the number of INGOs per governorate as an explanatory ‘convenient’ factor of local NGO’s allocation. Table 6 then shows the existing explanations and hypotheses for our analysis, while Table 7 provides the descriptive statistics of the variables included.

Box 1. Data collection

We use data on NGO placement (i.e., the division of local NGOs per governorate) for the year 2013 and decided to collect data for the independent variables using as two-year time-lag in order to minimise reverse causality. Collecting such data on important social, economic and political indicators divided over governorates turned out to be quite a challenge. Data was often incomplete at one source and we thus had to rely on using different sources for the same indicator. At the same time, using different data sources for specific indicators allowed cross-checking. In some cases, direct contact with representatives of ministries in Yemen or with Yemen embassies was required (and received). Besides, one of our main sources of information (the website of the Central Statistical Organisation of Yemen) was suddenly ‘suspended’ in mid 2015. Not in all cases we managed to find data for the year 2011 or 2012 and had to rely on older sources. This was, for instance, the case with data regarding poverty levels (the latest data available was for 2006). In other cases, data of an earlier year was understandable as in the case of parliamentary and local council elections. As the latest of these elections were held in 2003 and 2006 respectively, parliament and the local councils have not changed since then. Below we provide an overview of the sources for the dependent and independent variables used in this study.

Variable (per governorate)	Source(s)	Year
# LNGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Directory of NGOs in Yemen ▪ Civil Society Forum ▪ Human Rights Network in Yemen (personal) 	2013
Poor people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Central Statistical Organisation 	2006
Public health centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Central Statistical Organisation ▪ Ministry of Health 	2012
School attendance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Central Statistical Organisation 	2006
Access to Clean water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Central Statistical Organisation 	2009
Electricity use for lighting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Central Statistical Organisation 	2009
HIV/Aids prevalence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Central Statistical Organisation ▪ Ministry of Health 	2011
Urbanisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Central Statistical Organisation 	2009
Population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Central Statistical Organisation 	2009
Paved roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Central Statistical Organisation ▪ National Organisation for Information 	2009
# INGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Directory of NGOs in Yemen ▪ Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour (personal) ▪ Ministry of International cooperation (personal) 	2012
Members of Parliament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Committee for Election in Yemen 	2003
Members of Local Councils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Committee for Election in Yemen 	2006

The ‘saintly’ category essentially refers to the idea that NGOs go where the need for their work is highest. It corresponds with the main aim of most NGOs which is either poverty reduction in general or more specifically alleviating need in specific areas such as health and education. We measure this needs category by looking at the number of poor people (as % of the total population in a governorate) assuming that higher poverty prevalence attracts NGOs to work in the area. The same reasoning holds for other saintly predictors – which are generally used in needs-analyses and are consistent with a multidisciplinary understanding of

poverty: the availability of (1) safe drinking water (% of the population having access to piped water), (2) electricity (% of the population using electricity as lighting fuel), (3) public health facilities (number of people per public health facility), and (4) education (% of population between the age of 6 and 17 years attending school). We then add HIV/Aids prevalence (% of the population having HIV/Aids) as an additional needs predictor.

Table 6 Explanations and hypotheses

Theory	NGOs are more commonly located ...	Hypotheses. More NGOs in governorates with ...
'Saintly'	Where recipient need is great and alternative means of service provision are insufficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More poor people ▪ More people per public health centre ▪ Fewer people attending public school ▪ Fewer people having access to clean water ▪ Fewer people using electricity as lighting fuel ▪ Higher HIV/Aids prevalence
'Self-serving'	Where NGO workers or the NGO as an organisation have convenient access to goods and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A higher urbanisation rate ▪ A higher population density ▪ More paved roads ▪ More international NGOs (INGOs)
'Political'	In areas that powerful politicians help through their patronage networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More MPs belonging to the ruling party ▪ More members of Local Council belonging to the ruling party

Source: adapted from Brass 2012: 389

Table 7 Descriptive statistics

Variable	Governorate observations	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
No of national NGOs in 2013	21	80	2354	465.38	499.177
% Poor people	21	40.45	59.85	49.8766	6.52445
No of people per public health centre	20	5121.52	251500.00	41286.905	53196.0317
% Attending school	21	13	28	21.26	3.822
% Access to clean water	21	.1	98.1	21.088	22.0519
% Using electricity as lighting fuel	21	1.9	97.7	40.921	23.9543
% having HIV/Aids	21	.00	.14	.0228	.03057
% living in urban areas	21	.9	100.0	25.564	26.9539
Population density	21	1.2	16055.6	887.980	3478.3037
Paved roads density	20	.00	10.13	.5579	2.25293
No of international NGOs in 2012	21	49	66	54.52	5.269
MP from ruling party (%)	21	28.6	100.0	62.537	18.8412
Local council members from ruling party (%)	21	35.71	91.44	72.5502	16.15129

The 'self-serving' or 'convenience' category essentially states that NGOs will go there where they (and their workers) have convenient access to goods and services thus making their work and lives more pleasant and easier. Here we take the ease of reaching and travelling a governorate (km of paved roads per 1.000 km² in a governorate) as a first predictor. We also include population density (number of people per km², following the idea that being able to reach a large number of people is important for NGOs) and the urbanisation rate (% of population living in urban areas, following the idea that urban areas generally provide more easy access to goods and services than do rural areas) as independent variables for

convenience. As mentioned already, we include the presence of INGOs in a governorate as an additional convenience factor assuming that a higher number of INGOs working in an area makes access to knowledge, funding and cooperation opportunities easier for local NGOs.

Finally, and following the idea that political networks are important for the work of NGOs, we look at the ‘political’ category. Here, we assume that governorates with a stronger link to the ruling party have more NGOs than those that do not. We measure this strength at two levels (central and governorate) on the basis of the percentage of total MPs or Local Council members belonging to the ruling party.

4. Findings: what drives the geographical allocation of local NGOs in Yemen?

We estimate a two linear multiple regression in order to assess which factors determine the geographical distribution of national NGOs. First, however, we looked at the correlation between the independent variables used here. As Appendix 1 shows, several of these variables are highly correlated – within and between the three categories of predictors. In the ‘saintly’ category, Poverty (S-V1) is the only predictor that is not correlated to any of the other variables. Schools (S-V3) and Health Centres (S-V2) significantly correlate and we decided to include only Health Centres in our analysis. The remaining three ‘saintly’ indicators are all left out because they are not only highly correlated with each other but also with several convenience and political predictors. Following the same logic, in the ‘convenience’ or ‘self-serving’ category only INGOs (C-V4) and Population density (C-V2) remain as predictors. Under the ‘political’ category MPs (P-V1) and LC (Local Council members) (P-V2) significantly correlate. With MPs also correlating with INGOs we only included Local Council members as predictor here.

Table 8. Number of local NGOs

	<i>Saintly</i>	
S-V1	Poverty	-2.332 [6.719]
S-V2	Health facility	.000 [.001]
	<i>Self-serving</i>	
C-V2	Population density	.098*** [.014]
C-V4	INGOs	34.853** [9.567]
	<i>Political</i>	
P-V2	Local council members	3.335 [2.907]
	Constant	-1616.173
	Observations	21 (20)
	R ²	.897

Note: Table depicts OLS estimates with standard error in brackets where *p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01, two-tailed test.

The remaining five predictors then turn out to explain 89.7% of the variance in NGO placement in Yemen ($R^2 = .897$). At the same time, the outcomes of our regression (see Table 8) suggest that, all else being equal, only ‘self-serving’ convenience plays a role in determining where local NGOs in Yemen are active. Put differently: there are more local NGOs in governorates with more international NGOs and with a higher population density. Political and needs factors do not play a role in the decision of local NGOs where to work. Whereas Brass (2012: 395) on the basis of her findings characterised Kenyan NGOs as ‘pragmatic saints’, we have to characterise Yemeni NGOs as ‘pragmatics pur sang’.

Interestingly, almost all variables (whether significant or not) do point in the direction predicted in Table 6 (hypotheses). Table 9 (in a more substantive interpretation of our findings following Brass) shows the predicted effect of each variable. For each standard deviation increase in population density we thus find 341 more local NGOs in a governorate. The same can be seen with regard to INGOs (+184) and Local Council members belonging to the ruling party (+54).

The findings for INGOs are in accordance with those of Habraken et al. (2014) for Kenya. The number of international NGOs in 2012 significantly impacts the number of national NGOs at the governorate level, suggesting that as the number of international NGOs in an area increases, the number of local NGOs increases as well, leading to herding behaviour. We found that for each standard deviation (5,269 INGOs) increase in the number of INGOs, there will be an additional 184 local NGOs in the governorate. This might suggest that local NGOs follow international NGOs in their geographical choices in order to increase funding and work opportunities. On the contrary, we could adopt the alternative explanation that INGOs follow local NGOs as they seek local partner organisations to carry out their programme implementation.

The exception is formed by the two saintly predictors. Most remarkable here is Poverty. As Table 9 predicts there will be fewer local NGOs in a governorate if poverty increases (i.e., a 6.5% increase in poverty leads to 15 fewer NGOs being active in a governorate). While our theory and hypotheses suggest that more local NGOs should be active in a governorate with a higher number of poor people, our model thus depicts the opposite.

Table 9. Substantive interpretation

Variable	Coefficient	On standard deviation in the variable	Impact on number of local NGOs in a governorate (rounded to the nearest whole number)
Poverty	-2.332	6.5%	-15
Health facility	.000	53,196 people	0
Population density	.098***	3,478 people	+341
INGOs	34.853**	5.269 INGOs	+184
Local Council members	3.335	16,15 LC members	+54

*p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01

5. Concluding remarks and discussion

Our analysis provides a first attempt to understand why local NGOs in Yemen go where they go. In doing so, it contributes to a broader discussion about fragmentation and proliferation by including local NGOs and by looking into in-country placement. At the same time, also for the NGOs themselves and for donors it is important to increase their knowledge about the NGO sector in Yemen and to understand the extent to which local NGOs are driven by needs, convenience or political factors.

Our findings clearly show that political and needs factors do not determine where local NGOs in Yemen work. Instead, the number of these NGOs in a governorate depends only on convenience in terms of population density and the presence of International NGOs. Put differently: local NGOs are driven primarily by factors through which they have convenient access to a large number of people and to (contacts and probably funding of) INGOs. Needs factors (e.g., the poverty situation in a governorate) do not play a role (or even point in the opposite direction as expected) in Yemen whereas they did in Kenya.

As mentioned already, our findings indicate that local NGOs in Yemen are ‘pragmatics pur sang’. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that using the term ‘pragmatics’ is in fact a (negative) value judgement; the same of which can be said about terms such as ‘convenience’, ‘saintly’ and ‘self-serving’. One might also look at the fact that local NGOs are primarily driven by population density and the presence of international NGOs differently. What if these local NGOs use the presence of international NGOs to be better able to coordinate their activities and thus prevent duplications? Would that then have to be seen as ‘self-serving’ or as actually a contribution to more effective service provision? And what if the same effectiveness-reason underlies their choice to work in densely populated regions?

Besides, our analysis does not (and cannot – because of data constraints) take into account the type of work of the different local NGOs. Organisations for which lobby and advocacy are the primary means of operation, for instance, have everything to gain from being close to centres of power. For them being active in a remote area thus makes little sense, whereas working in Sana’a city does.

Finally, one might wonder whether in the specific case of Yemen we should have paid attention to the security situation in the country. It might, for instance, be hypothesised that more NGOs will be active in governorates with fewer security problems. For follow-up research on NGO placement in Yemen it would be worthwhile to include such a variable just as it would be valuable to explore changes over time and not only rely on quantitative data but also on interviews with local NGOs themselves.

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