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Anja Onali

Serving Many Masters

A Liberian Non-Governmental Organization Managing Multiple Legitimacy Audiences

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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ABSTRACT

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The dissertation advances an understanding of the role and relationships of Southern NGOs (SNGO) in the intersection of the organizational field of development cooperation and the local context, especially in post-conflict situations.

Drawing on organizational institutionalism, development cooperation is seen as an organizational field with specific ideas, norms, symbolic elements, and social mechanisms that shape organizations. Legitimacy is conceptualized as the perception that other actors, or legitimacy audiences, within an organizational field have of an organization and its fit in the field.

The study asks which legitimacy audiences are perceived to be the most important by the SNGO and examines what kind of organizational responses the SNGO uses to manage different legitimation audiences' multiple legitimacy demands.

To answer the research questions, a qualitative case study of a Liberian NGO was conducted, including content analysis of data from organizational development interventions, interviews, participatory observation, and documents.

The study identified three main legitimacy audiences – the Ministry of Education, donors, and the local communities – and five main strategies the NGO used to manage them. These were the following: Conforming to local NGOing; Influencing; Striving for independence; Conforming to local cultural-cognitive expectations; and Co-creating responses to legitimacy audiences' own legitimacy pressures. The organization itself has changed during its long history. The main influences have been the civil wars that threatened its existence and the donor policies that affected the structure and identity of the organization.

Keywords: development cooperation, legitimacy, Liberia, non-governmental organizations, organizational institutionalism

TIIVISTELMÄ (ABSTRACT IN FINNISH)

Onali, Anja
Monen herran palvelijana. Liberialaisen kansalaisjärjestön keinot käsitellä useiden legitimiteettiyleisöjen vaatimuksia
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Tämä tutkimus edistää ymmärrystä etelän kansalaisjärjestöjen roolista ja suhteista kansainvälisen kehitysyhteistyön kentän ja paikallisen kontekstin välissä, erityisesti konfliktin jälkeisessä tilanteessa.

Tutkimuksessa kehitysyhteistyö käsitetään organisationaalisena kenttänä, jolle on ominaista tietyt ideat, normit ja symboliset elementit, sekä sosiaaliset mekanismit, jotka muovaavat organisaatioita. Vastaavasti legitimiteetti määritellään kentän muiden toimijoiden, eli legitimiteettiyleisöjen, käsityksiksi organisaatiosta ja sen sopivuudesta kentälle.

Tutkimus kysyy mitkä ovat etelän kansalaisjärjestön käsityksen mukaan sen tärkeimmät legitimiteettiyleisöt ja millaisia organisationaalisia keinoja se käyttää selvitäkseen niiden moninaisista legitimiteettiä koskevista odotuksista ja vaatimuksista.

Tutkimuskysymyksiin etsittiin vastauksia laadullisen tapaustutkimuksen avulla. Aineisto kerättiin liberialaisen kansalaisjärjestön työstä organisaation kehittämisinterventioiden, haastattelujen, osallistuvan havainnoinnin ja dokumenttien avulla.

Tutkimuksessa identifioitiin kolme pääsasiallista legitimiteettiyleisöä, jotka olivat opetusministeriö, avunantajat ja paikalliset yhteisöt. Kansalaisjärjestö käytti viittä organisationaalista strategiaa näiden hallinnoinnissa. Ne olivat mukautuminen paikallisen kansalaisjärjestön rooliin; vaikuttaminen; pyrkimys itsenäisyyteen; paikallisiin kulttuuris-kognitiivisiin odotuksiin mukautuminen ja vastausten tuottaminen muihin toimijoihin kohdistuviin legitimiteettivaatimuksiin. Järjestö on muuttunut pitkän historiansa aikana. Tähän ovat vaikuttaneet erityisesti sisällissotien aika, joka uhkasi järjestön olemassaoloa, sekä avunantajien käytännöt, jotka ovat muokanneet järjestön rakennetta ja identiteettiä.

Asiasanat: kansalaisjärjestöt, kehitysyhteistyö, legitimiteetti, Liberia, organisationaalinen institutionalismi

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I dedicate this dissertation to my wise and wonderful daughters, Katri and Sanni, not as a bar to be reached but as proof of all the possibilities that life has to offer.

Jyväskylä, 13 September 2021

Anja Onali

FIGURES

TABLES

ABBREVIATIONS

AALAE	African Association for Literacy and Adult Education
ABE	adult basic education
ACS	American Colonization Society
AE	adult education
AfT	Agenda for Transformation
AI	Appreciative Inquiry
AL	adult literacy
ALP	Accelerated Learning Program
ARC	American Refugee Committee
ATLAS.ti	Archive for Technology, Lifeworld and Everyday Language.text interpretation
AWPSG	African Women and Peace Support Group
AYP	Advancing Youth Program
BPF	Big Push Forward
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CBO	Community-Based Organization
CDRA	Community Development Resource Association
CEP	Community Empowerment Program
CESLY	Core Education Skills for Liberian Youth
CIVICUS	World Alliance for Citizen Participation
CLHRE	Center for Law and Human Rights Education
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CSO	civil society organization
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
DDRR	disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration
DEN–L	Development Education Network – Liberia
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DOSTANGO	donor states and NGOs
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ED	executive director
EFA	Education for All
EPAG	Empowerment Program for Adolescent Girls
EPO	Equatorial Palm Oil
EU	European Union
FBO	faith-based organization
FRC	Finnish Refugee Council
g7+	an intergovernmental organization of 20 countries affected by conflict and on the transitions towards resilience
GEL	Girls Education Liberia
GoL	Government of Liberia

GSP	Generalized System of Preferences
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
HIV/AIDS	human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
IBIS	a member-based Danish development organization
ICAE	International Council for Adult Education
IGNU	Interim Government of National Unity
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	international NGO
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IREX	International Research and Exchange Board
JPC	Catholic Justice and Peace Commission
LCC	Liberia Council of Churches
LIBTRALO	Liberian Translation and Literacy Organization
LINGO Forum	Liberia's International Non-Governmental Organizations' Forum
LMC	Literacy Management Committee
LPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
LWI	Liberia Women Initiative
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoGD	Ministry of Gender and Development
MOJA	Movement for Justice in Africa
MoU	memorandum of understanding
MPEA	Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs
NAEAL	National Adult Education Association of Liberia
NARDA	New African Agency for Research and Development
NGO	non-governmental organization
NMCL	National Muslim Council of Liberia
NNGO	Northern NGO
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPM	new public management
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
OCA	organizational capacity assessment
ODA	official development assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAC	Partnership Africa Canada
PAL	Progressive Alliance of Liberia
PROSEPER	People, Rules, and Organizations Supporting the Protection of Ecosystem Resources
PRS	poverty reduction strategy
PTA	Parent Teacher Association

RBM	results-based management
REFLECT	an approach to facilitated group learning and action developed by ActionAid to support adult literacy
SDG	sustainable development goal
SMWF	Sirleaf Market Women's Fund
SNGO	Southern NGO
TAP	Technical Assistance Project
ToR	terms of reference
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
ULAA	Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNWOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States dollar
WB	World Bank
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
ZOA	an international relief and recovery organization based in the Netherlands

MAP OF LIBERIA

Source: http://www.mapsopensource.com/images/liberia-map-black-and-white.gif

CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

This study explores the diverse legitimacy audiences of a Southern non-governmental organization (NGO) and its responses to multiple legitimacy demands. The focus is on the National Adult Literacy Association of Liberia (NAEAL). The topic is relevant for the ongoing discussion concerning development cooperation in general and the role of NGOs in development in particular, and it seeks to further our understanding of the situation of Southern NGOs (SNGO) in their relationships with different actors and within the international development cooperation architecture.

The study contributes to the fairly novel approach that considers development cooperation as an organizational field and draws its theoretical concepts from organizational institutionalism (Meyer & Rowan 1977; DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Greenwood et al. 2017). The findings of this study provide insights into both studies on development NGOs and their management (Lewis 2007, 2019; Claeyé 2014; Dar & Cooke 2008) and organizational institutionalism and the interplay between these two fields of study.

According to organizational institutionalism, organizations do not change to become efficient but to become more legitimate in the eyes of different stakeholder groups. Legitimacy is needed for survival, and it depends on the perception that other actors, or legitimacy audiences, within an organizational field (Wooten & Hoffman 2017), have of an organization and its fit to the field. Studies on legitimacy to date have revolved around international NGOs (Deloffre & Schmitz 2019), private foundations (Fejerskov 2018b), or SNGOs and their relations with one set of stakeholders, for example, with the government (Ramanth 2009) or with donors (Elbers & Arts 2001). This study offers a view on how a Southern NGO manages multiple legitimacy relationships with multiple legitimacy audiences simultaneously.

The context of Liberia has featured in development studies especially around the civil wars (Utas 2003, 2014; Ellis 2007; Käihkö 2016; Vastapuu 2018) and women's role in the society or in the civil wars (Moran 1988, 1989, 2012; Fuest 2008; Vastapuu 2018) but there is not much research on NGOs (Fuest 2010, 2014; Gilfoy 2016). Even though Liberia provides a less researched country context for studying NGO legitimacy, it also introduces specific features of a post–conflict situation as an environment for the organizations into the discussion. The fieldwork for the study was conducted in the early 2010s, and so it describes the situation in Liberia and the field of development cooperation at a time when Liberia was transitioning from a post-war reconstruction phase into a more developmental phase. This process is challenging and deserves to be studied.

In this introduction, I first contextualize my study within the literature on development cooperation and NGOs in development. Second, I briefly justify the need for analysing legitimacy and the use of the approach of organizational institutionalism. Third, I present my research questions, and fourth, introduce the case NGO. Finally, an outline of the report is provided.

1.1 Trends in development cooperation

In this dissertation, development cooperation is presented as an organizational field that affects the organizations belonging to that specific field through norms, ideas, and social mechanisms. I first provide an overview of the field of development cooperation, but because the field of development cooperation is vast, I only present themes and features that help to follow the discussion and analysis later on in this study and to situate the case organization in its contexts at the time the study was conducted.

1.1.1 New actors

Although this study is mainly concerned with the role of SNGOs, the dynamics within the field of development cooperation affect them. A brief overview of the actors, especially the new entrants to the field is given here.

Entering the 2010s, which is the period of the dissertation, development cooperation was experiencing changes. According to Gore (2013), new actors were entering the field, and new approaches and institutions appeared. Development cooperation used to refer to official development assistance (ODA) provided mainly by the OECD/DAC countries that would obtain their normative and cognitive frameworks from the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). However, financially the relative importance of this traditional form of development cooperation was diminishing and the importance of foreign direct investments, remittances from workers, public and private borrowing as well as aid money from non-DAC sources was growing (Gore 2013, 770–771).

The non-DAC sources of development funding included new governmental actors, but also private foundations and global funds that were gaining importance. The group of non-DAC governmental providers included Eastern and Central European countries that aligned with OECD/DAC norms as well as countries like Brazil, India, China, and Venezuela that engaged in South–South development cooperation, and Arab donors such as Kuwait and Saudi Arabia (Gore 2013, 770). The entry of South-South cooperation provided an alternative model for DAC-type of cooperation, as it was claimed to be based on solidarity, be more horizontal between equals, and include less policy conditionality than did traditional development cooperation. However, it may be tied to, for example, the use of natural resources, trade and investment interests within infrastructure and productive sectors, and concessional loans (Gore 2013, 774). Another group that was growing in importance was the private foundations, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. They have increased the heterogeneity of actors and provided substantial aid flows, as well as introduced new practices and discourses emanating from the business sector. (Fejerskov 2018b, 4-5.)

Despite their differences, the new actors were becoming socialized with the dominant discourses and practices of development cooperation, as shown by Fejerskov (2018b) for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and Gulrajani and Swiss (2019) for the non-DAC donor countries. According to Gulrajani and Swiss (2019), the new donors wished to be considered as advanced and influential states and participation in development cooperation is considered to be part of the status of a developed nation.

1.1.2 Aid effectiveness and results-based management

Development cooperation as a field engages with various normative goals and frameworks that different actors are inclined to follow. These frameworks led to the discussion on aid effectiveness and the accompanying results-based thinking which were prominent in the 2010s and were also visible in the Liberian context.

Politically, the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) [1] that had been agreed upon in 2000 by the UN member states (United Nations 2021) set the tone for development cooperation at the beginning of the 21st century. The eight goals included the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger; the achievement of universal primary education; the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women; the reduction of child mortality; the improvement of maternal health; combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and the development of a global partnership for development. They were accompanied by the aid effectiveness agenda and the Paris Declaration that aimed at improving development cooperation practice and the mutual accountability of donors and recipients. In the Third High-Level Forum in Accra in 2008, the number of participating actors increased. The role of civil society was also heightened, the Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness was established and the so-called Istanbul Principles were drafted. (OECD 2021.)

The aid effectiveness agenda has, however, received its fair share of criticism. According to various scholars (see e.g. Fowler 1997; Cracknell 2000; Gulrajani 2011; Mebrahtu et al. 2007), the agenda moved development

[1] The MDGs were followed by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the 2030 Agenda in 2015. (United Nations 2015)

cooperation in a technocratic, managerial, and state-centred direction because the management of development cooperation was treated as a technical matter with no consideration of the power issues embedded in the relationships of donors and recipients, or the local political dynamics. The myriad of indicators included in the new initiatives was claimed to simplify a hard-to-measure reality, and the accountability practices diverted attention from development goals towards short-term fixes and risk avoidance.

The Paris declaration adopted results-based management (RBM), an approach that had its origins in the private sector in the 1950s and 1960s. The goal of RBM was to improve management through informed decision-making, adaptive planning and learning, and to give flexibility to managers as well as workers in deciding the best ways to reach targets.

RBM became part of the new public management (NPM) trend in the 1980s when various OECD countries modernized their public sector and moved towards market-based solutions. NPM was supposed to bring about a profound change from direction by rules and regulations to the efficient and effective delivery of positive social impacts within the public sector. However, the critics of NPM claimed that instead of creating flexibility, it emphasized performance measurement and auditing as well as evidence-based styles of reasoning, and the logic of the financial audit penetrated almost all spheres of life to the extent that we can now be said to be living in "an audit society" (Power 1997) and surrounded by "an audit culture" (Strathern 2000). This led to an erosion of trust (O'Neill 2002) and created perverse incentives instead of improvements in public services.

In development cooperation, RBM appeared in the 1990s as donor agencies embraced the trend. Sophisticated performance and management systems were developed while monitoring and evaluation professionals were hired (Gulrajani 2011). Significant emphasis was put on finding clear cause-effect relations, building indicators, and reporting systems based on these premises. Evaluation was seen as an objective way to decide worth and to satisfy the value-for-money considerations of interventions.

However, experiences with RBM were mixed, as it seemed to lead to controlling management practices instead of learning (Shutt 2016). The linear models might work in a stable situation and narrowly defined projects, but when it comes to large programs that include wicked problems in an unstable context, the linear conceptualization of change and the nature of causality might fall short (see for example, Davies 2004; Davies 2005; Ramalingam 2013; Patton 2011; Holma & Kontinen 2011). An overemphasis on indicators and performance measures started to lessen flexibility, which was one of the key ingredients of RBM, and lead to an obsessive measurement disorder, as the overemphasis on indicators was called by the former USAID Administrator Natsios (Natsios 2010).

Calls for alternative approaches and tools started to appear. The Big Push Forward (BPF) community was calling for more complexity-oriented understandings of development cooperation and approaches that would be suited for assessing transformative processes already in 2010 (Eyben et al. 2015).

Other groups such as Thinking and Working Politically, and Doing Development Differently as well as some INGOs and for example, DFID and IDEA started to look for alternatives (Shutt 2016). For example, Doing Development Differently was calling for more focus on locally defined problems, understanding of the local context, and the adaptation and flexibility of interventions in changing circumstances (Honig & Gulrajani 2018).

Within the past ten years, some experiments with these new adaptive management systems have been taking place (Alexius & Vähämäki 2020), but there is a danger that they too are becoming well-intentioned top-down initiatives (Shutt 2016) that need to be combined with Value-for-Money considerations (Laws & Valters 2021). Gutheil's (2020) findings show that these new ideas are not translating into practice because they are tied to earlier ways of working and interacting among individuals and the aid system in general.

1.1.3 From post-conflict reconstruction to the triple nexus

In addition to the institutional context of development cooperation, Liberia is the country context for this study. Liberia suffered a series of civil wars that ended in 2003, after which efforts for peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction started together with the international community. In the beginning of the 2010s, Liberia was slowly moving from reconstruction after the civil wars into a phase of development. This transition meant that there was a gradual shift away from the international scripts for humanitarian aid and peace and reconstruction towards development cooperation. This introduced new kinds of challenges and special dynamics between the local and the international actors. A brief introduction to the related discussions follows.

After the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, the nature of armed conflicts changed. Wars between states, or civil wars with clear parties, were replaced by conflicts internal to states with complex social, political and economic as well as cultural reasons, including religion and ethnicity, usually with various fighting parties. The conflicts changed from one-off events to ongoing and repeated ones that link various forms of violence. (World Bank 2011, 2) These "new wars" are not necessarily confined to a single state, but flow over borders and regions to form "systems of social transformation" (Duffield 2001, in Koponen 2010, 32) that include transborder resource networks which are integrated into the global economy and are comprised of various social groups, diasporas, strongmen, and organized criminal networks.

The altered nature of violent conflicts posed a threat to development. As the World Development Report 2011 (World Bank 2011, 5) noted, no conflict-affected or fragile country had achieved any of the MDGs. The report cautioned that poverty, undernourishment, lack of clean water, child mortality, and missed opportunities for schooling would have human, economic, and social costs with repercussions across multiple generations.

Within development, the discourse on fragile states and situations intensified after the 9/11 attacks in 2001 and the "War on Terror" that followed. Until then, the continuum from relief to reconstruction had been the leading model in shifting from humanitarian efforts to longer-term development, but now a more integrated approach was being sought. In 2007, the OECD/DAC issued the Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations. The principles called for context sensitivity and flexibility in different settings, attention to doing no harm with interventions, focusing on statebuilding, recognition of the links between political, security, and development goals, prioritization of prevention, and the promotion of human rights, gender equity, and social inclusion. (OECD 2007.)

A group of fragile states themselves, the g7+, including Liberia, also worked on the issues of peacebuilding and statebuilding. Their dialogue was codified in the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States in 2011 at the 4th High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan. The New Deal's peacebuilding and statebuilding goals were integrated into Liberia's Agenda for Transformation, which was the medium-term economic growth and development strategy for 2012-2017 (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs 2013, 154-155). The aim was that the Liberian government would be in the driver's seat and coordinate donor efforts. Chapter 4 provides more information on how the situation evolved in Liberia.

The UN prompted the eradication of sectoral silos between humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding in 2017 by introducing the Triple Nexus concept, which provides a more holistic view especially in cases where these sectors overlap (Barakat & Milton 2020, 148). This has since been followed by an OECD/DAC Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus. The effects of these recommendations remain to be seen.

As Koponen (2010, 24–25) explains, security concerns have been included in development thinking since the 1940s, and the underlying motivation has been to ensure the security of the West. As a continuum, the stabilization of fragile states can be seen as part of the provision of global public goods, in the same manner as the mitigation of climate change or fighting pandemics (Gore 2013, 772). All of these pose global threats and therefore their mitigation also benefits Western countries.

The role of the West, or the Global North, has been criticized for imposing a liberal social order that includes promoting a market economy connected to the global economy and Western-style representative democracy in fragile regions (Duffield 2001, reference in Hakkarainen 2012, 165). These goals might not be compatible with the realities of fragile states. The emphasis on statebuilding has been criticized for being ill-advised in situations where the state is not living up to the state–society contract with its citizens, and there might be local indigenous institutions that are in fact providing security and social services (Engberg-Pedersen et al. 2008, in Koponen 2010, 39–40). The World Development Report 2011 (World Bank 2011) also cautioned the adoption of Western institutions, or even other Southern ones, in fragile situations without adaptation and considerations of the best fit for each case.

The policy ideals, however, remain far from the realities and practices on the ground (see e.g. Doty 2016). The military and civilian crisis management, humanitarian aid, and development cooperation have differing starting points and modes of operation, which has made it difficult for them to work smoothly together (Ruohomäki 2012). Despite the calls for context assessments, interventions have been delivered with a one-size-fits-all method in different contexts or as parts of multi-country programmes. The mechanisms have been adopted from natural disaster relief without consideration of the complexities of political and violent conflicts. As a result, they may accentuate the root causes of conflicts instead of resolving them.

Part of the problem with contextualization has been the attitudes towards local actors. For example, MacGuinty and Richmond (2013) call for a "local turn" that would relocate power from the international actors to local ones and value local agency in getting by in the everyday lives of people after a conflict situation. Localization is, however, fundamentally a political process that has the potential to address power imbalances nationally and internationally. It would entail that governments release control for local-level actors, and international actors would have to rethink their standards of accountability and requirements for risk management. (Barak & Milton 2020, 150, 158.)

Local actors may lack the capacity or willingness to plan, implement and coordinate international aid (Gizelis & Joseph 2016), and the short time frames usually attached to these interventions are not conducive for capacity building. There is also a concern that local actors may not be able to absorb the amounts of resources that flow in. In a conflict, or post-conflict situation, foreign actors find it hard to define who to trust in the local context as different actors may have connections to the warring parties. Even local experts may be detached from the realities outside the capital city. This may lead donors to establish their own structures and delivery mechanisms that include long chains of implementation through, for example, international NGOs. (Barakat & Milton 2020.)

Liberia is one of these fragile states. In the beginning of the 2010s, Liberia was slowly transitioning from reconstruction after its civil wars into a phase of development. This transition meant there was a gradual shift away from the international scripts for humanitarian aid as well as peace and reconstruction towards development cooperation. This created a special dynamic from the organizational field of development cooperation and added to the multiplicity of legitimacy demands from the donor community.

1.2 Non-governmental organizations in development

Because the focus of the dissertation is on SNGOs, I will briefly introduce the general discussion on the importance of NGOs as actors both in development and within the triple nexus and the specific dilemmas attached to them.

The heyday of NGOs within international development was during the 1980s and 1990s. A revived enthusiasm for civil society started from Eastern Europe, which rose against authoritarian governments and looked for more democratic forms of organization, and it spread to Latin America, the Soviet

Union, and Africa. (Howell et al. 2008.) Development agencies took on the idea of supporting civil society in developing and transition countries as that seemed to provide a solution to the persistent problems that donors were facing with state-led development.

For the donors, the NGOs offered fresh perspectives and alternative ideas, providing space for people to participate in development, and the donors relied on NGOs to be the voice and representatives of the poor (Igoe & Kelsall 2005, 24–25). NGOs could be used as representatives of civil society in the promotion of democratization and good governance, human rights, and other important development issues. According to donors, free-market economic ideas and downsizing of government could be achieved by channelling funds through NGOs because they could deliver cost-effective services. (Howell et al. 2008; Igoe & Kelsall 2005; Lewis & Kanji 2009.) With the donor money pouring in, the number of NGOs skyrocketed. As NGOs grew in importance within development cooperation, the number of NGOs in the Global South also multiplied and the financing they received increased.

Towards the end of the 1990s, the donors learned that managing a portfolio of small grants to a great number of NGOs was time-consuming and involved high transaction costs. This made the donors limit the number of organizations that were receiving aid. At the same time, more and more requirements for upward accountability were established to secure the efficiency of aid. Concentration on short-term, easy to measure outcomes instead of long-term transformative goals was observed, as NGOs changed their agendas to meet the demands of donors. (Najam 1996; Edwards & Hulme 1996.) The NGOs needed to become better at fulfilling the donor demands and the sector underwent a trend of professionalization due to the need to master the discourses and buzzwords donors considered important. For example, Wallace et al. (2007) demonstrated that donors and their management fads had a strong impact on NGO behaviour. This meant that only the fittest survived and the smaller, less recognized and possibly more politically active organizations lost (Howell et al. 2008).

At the same time, there was a critique from the social movements towards NGOs that they seemed to co-opt with donors and governments in the marketization of the economy. Instead of representing the poor, the NGOs imposed market ideas, for example in the form of microcredit, on people. With the lure of donor money, many social movements turned into NGOs and lost their political role (Kaldor 2003) and people working for NGOs seemed to lose their radicalism and become self-interested (Lewis & Kanji 2009). For example, Ulvila and Hossain (2002) showed that development NGOs in Bangladesh and Nepal tended to align with the local elite interests instead of promoting the political participation of the poor.

Criticism from the press was also notable. INGOs and local NGOs were caught for misuse of funds and problems were reported in their fundraising and advocacy work as well as in their management and governance. Allegations of abuses of power regarding vulnerable people, such as refugees, were also reported (Cavill & Sohail 2007).

The NGO sector was gaining power but did not have a clear mandate that would be based on local constituencies (Cavill & Sohail 2007). The concern for losing the relationship with the poor and becoming more and more accountable towards the donors was a concern for the NGOs themselves as well (Hulme & Edwards 1996). Self-regulation mechanisms and codes of conduct for the voluntary sector and literature on how accountability relations should be organized as well as frameworks on how to operationalize it proliferated. The aim was to have a learning component in the accountability efforts instead of the audit style of donor appraisals. (Edwards & Hulme 1996.) According to Edwards and Hulme (1996), effective NGO accountability consisted of a clear mission, transparent decision-making procedures, honest financial and progress reporting, an internal appraisal of the leadership function, and mechanisms for reward and penalty.

The enthusiasm with frameworks was accompanied by calls to consider accountability as a virtue with more attention to core values and professional behaviours and as an instrument of politics and power, not simply as a technical issue (Lister 2003; Cavill & Sohail 2007).

The position of NGOs is a special one. They are accountable to donors, communities and themselves (Najam 1996), but these multiple accountability relationships may be in conflict with each other. The abilities of the actors to enforce their rights to information, reporting, appraisal, and sanctions vary considerably. While donors can withhold their contribution to NGOs, most poor communities have little means to hold NGOs accountable. Therefore, some NGOs started to develop mechanisms for downward accountability (see e.g. ActionAid 2000; Jacobs & Wilford 2010).

Accountability has since become one of the buzzwords of the current development debate. It is broadly used but rarely defined. It is also used within very different discourses, which reflects its origin in political processes that are part of bigger economic and political agendas. (Newell & Bellour 2002.) Both advocates of the neo-liberal ideology as well as citizens' accountability movement use the term.

The attacks on the World Trade Center on the 11 September 2001 and the "Global War on Terrorism" that followed meant the beginning of hard times for civil society. Western, transition, and developing country governments started to consider civil society as a potential threat and cover-up for terrorist activities (Howell et al. 2008), and the suspicion and regulation of NGOs' work increased.

The rediscovery of the role of the state in development within the Paris Declaration of Aid Effectiveness meant fewer resources for NGOs, and as the civil society was included in the international processes of aid effectiveness, donor requirements for accountability proliferated.

The new donors from other Southern countries have their ways of dealing with developing country governments and are not especially interested in promoting civil society concerns. At the same time, there are new sources of financing from private foundations and new forms of aid that seek to combine private–public–NGO partnerships that require new forms of professionalism from NGOs.

In fragile and conflict situations, donors may be tempted to channel resources through NGOs for services that are urgently needed by the local people while the state is unable to provide them (Mcloughlin 2011). In addition to this gap-filling role for services, NGOs, as representatives of the local civil society, are also seen as a vehicle for peace and reconstruction. For example, Van Leeuwen and Verkoren (2012, 83-84) caution that in both cases there may be negative consequences. Service provision by NGOs may weaken the state by postponing the social contract between the state and the people. Positioning the NGOs in the role of service providers may also strip the civil society of its more political roles, even though strengthening the civil society is usually the outspoken goal of peacebuilding programmes.

An additional challenge is embedded in the way that donors promote a neoliberal perspective of civil society as an element of democracy and as a counterforce to the state. Such an approach may not concur with the local realities. Locally different forms of religious, ethnic, and traditional institutions, as well as former militias, can be more important for people in providing services and in organizing everyday life than the state and relationships of patronage may override ideas of citizenship. (Van Leeuwen & Verkoren 2012, 87-88.)

1.3 Towards exploring legitimacy in a Southern NGO

In the NGO management literature, NGO legitimacy is usually related to accountability, representativeness, and performance (Lister 2003; Egholm et al. 2019) that can to a certain extent be influenced by the NGOs themselves through various top-down or bottom-up measures (Walton et al. 2016).

In this study, I draw from organizational institutionalism, which considers legitimacy a perception of others on the appropriateness and desirability of an organization within a certain socially constructed system of values, norms and beliefs (Suchman 1995, 574). Legitimacy, therefore, comes from outside of the organization, from the legitimating environment, and from the stakeholders that assess the organization (Deephouse & Suchman 2008, 54). From an institutionalist perspective, an NGO would be an object whose acceptability is under assessment. The sources of legitimacy are not the NGO's own actions, but the internal and external stakeholders, or legitimacy audiences as Suchman (1995) calls them, which revolve around the organization and evaluate if they consider the organization to be legitimate.

Drawing on organizational institutionalism, development cooperation is seen here as an organizational field with its specific ideas, norms, symbolic elements, and social mechanisms that shape organizations within the field. Development cooperation engages with numerous principles and templates that circulate in the field and are transmitted from organization to organization, including SNGOs. Because legitimacy is needed for survival as well as depends on the perception that other actors within an organizational field have of an organization and its fit to the field, the adoption of these ideas becomes an important part of legitimacy within the field.

This study adds to the new and emerging field of applications of organizational institutionalism to development cooperation (See Claeyé & Jackson 2012; Kontinen 2018, Fejerskov 2015, 2016, 2018a; Brinkerhoff 2005; Elbers & Arts 2011; Burchardt 2013, Watkins et al. 2012). To date, organizational institutionalism has been a Western line of research, but it resonates with African contexts as well. This is especially so because the globalization of practices and cultures now occurs globally, which creates an interplay between the local context and the global institutional pressures (Pache & Santos 2010, 471). The field of development cooperation is an even more special case because it projects institutional logics internationally (Hammack & Heydemann 2009) and interferes directly with the local context with the intention of changing its logics to ones that are more "appropriate".

This study engages with organizational institutionalism because it offers tools to understand the importance of the social context and the different forces, both local and field level, that shape organizations. Part of these forces derives from ideas and symbolic elements that play an important role in organizational life. Another feature that organizational institutionalism provides is the attention to history and how it shapes organizations and institutions (Scott 2008). As Alasuutari (2015) notes, organizational institutionalism is also apt for exploring the paradoxes between ambitious goals and how things actually work, which is very much the case in development cooperation.

1.4 Research aims and research questions

Within development cooperation, different actors engage in networks of relationships in which many of them have multiple roles. This produces a situation of institutional complexity where an organization is confronted with multiple demands for its legitimacy. There is a need for more empirical understanding of how the multiple demands work out in practice and how a Southern NGO copes with and manages them. This is specially so for SNGOs, which are confronted with legitimacy demands from two very different directions: the field of development cooperation and the local context.

This study asks the following questions:

1. What are the most important legitimacy audiences perceived by an SNGO?
2. What kind of organizational responses does an SNGO use to manage legitimacy audiences' multiple legitimacy demands?

First, to find out which actors could be considered the most important legitimacy audiences, the perceptions of the SNGO staff regarding the organization's main stakeholders are identified. These perceptions are examined by following the staff's interactions with the named stakeholders. The interactions will reveal the nature of the relationship, whether it is marked by, for example, trust and collaboration, or by suspicion and the exercise of power.

Second, data are collected on each of the stakeholder groups mentioned above to find out what sorts of expectations they have for the SNGO. This is then followed by observations on how the SNGO meets these expectations, that is, what sorts of actions the SNGO resorts to. Based on the concrete actions, broader managerial strategies are elaborated.

For both of the above mentioned research questions the influence of the country context and historical developments are taken into consideration.

1.5 The case of a Southern NGO

To answer the research questions, a qualitative case study of a Liberian NGO, the National Adult Education Association of Liberia (NAEAL), was conducted. It represents a case of a Southern development NGO that works with local communities with resources that it receives from development cooperation funds. As a consequence, it is situated at the intersection of the local context and the field of development cooperation.

NAEAL was established in 1977 when the local teachers of adult literacy organized themselves. To this day, it continues to promote adult literacy in Liberia. Adult literacy and education is one sector where local NGOs may be considered to be in a better position to reach the population than the government is, because they may be more flexible when it comes to choosing the language of the education and the specific skills and thematic areas that are brought up in the curriculum. Hanemann (2005) notes that NGOs may also be more agile and less politically charged than the government in a post-conflict situation.

NAEAL provides services by organizing literacy circles that promote adult literacy and encourage people to be active within their communities. In the long run, this will promote their self-confidence and prepare them for engagement on the national level for the social transformation of the country, as stated in NAEAL's strategic plan. (NAEAL 2010.) NAEAL has an active role as an advocate for adult literacy and adult education in Liberia. In this role, it also engages with the government, and especially with the Ministry of Education (MoE), which is the sector regulator for alternative basic education.

The need to address the vast adult illiteracy in Liberia is a shared goal for the MoE and NAEAL. Literacy is important for personal and social reasons because it enables people to obtain information and reflect on the context in which they live (Bhola & Valdivieso Gómez 2008). In a post-conflict situation, adult literacy needs to be expanded in ways that promote values, attitudes, and skills that lead to peaceful relationships. Otherwise, it may do more harm than good. However, the context needs to be supportive of continued literacy if the new abilities are to be sustained. (Bhola & Valdivieso Gómez 2008, 7.)

NAEAL's pedagogical thinking draws on the REFLECT methodology, which combines participatory methods with Paulo Freire's (Freire & Ramos 1972) thinking. The literacy circles in the communities are conducted in an encouraging atmosphere by facilitators that have been trained to involve the learners in learning and discussion. The circles have manuals for each participant and other available materials such as stones for counting numbers, and letters written on cardboard, are used. The programme lasts for nine months and, during that time, basic literacy and numeracy can be learned.

NAEAL depends on donor resources, so it is obligated to adopt the various requirements that come with those resources. These are related to project management, especially monitoring and reporting of finances, activities and results, and to the various themes that are trendy within the field of development cooperation.

At the beginning of the 2010s, in addition to scarce resources, NAEAL also had the challenge of representation. It had lost its membership base during the war times and relied on the members of the Board of Directors that had a varying amount of time to dedicate to the organization. The staff turnover was high, as donor projects were short term and unpredictable. Another limiting factor was the lack of transportation to cover the literacy circles that were spread across various counties.

1.6 Outline of the dissertation

This dissertation is composed of eight chapters. Following the introduction, chapter two outlines the main theoretical concepts of the study. The theoretical framework draws on organizational institutionalism, which provides explanations for the behavior of organizations as they strive for legitimacy within a particular organizational field.

Chapter three presents the methodological choices made for the study. It describes how the qualitative case study of a Liberian NGO unfolded to represent a Southern NGO in the intersection of the organizational field of development cooperation and the local context. Data collection methods that drew inspiration from ethnography and action research are described, as is the process of data analysis and interpretation. The chapter concludes with ethical considerations and personal reflections on the research process.

Chapter four tells the story of the case NGO, NAEAL, alongside the history of Liberia. NAEAL originated as a teacher organization that had the idea of 'each one teach one to read' in the 1970s. The years of civil war and post-conflict period meant a struggle for survival and doing projects not exclusively related to adult literacy. Between the 2006 and 2010, there was a return to the vision of a Liberia free of illiteracy, and NAEAL was able to re-establish itself as a credible local

NGO with a distinct area of expertise. The chapter closes with NAEAL staff's hopes for the future of the organization.

Chapters five, six and seven present research data and information as well as the findings of the study for the three main legitimacy audiences identified, namely, the MoE, donors, and the local communities.

Chapter five deals with the Ministry of Education, which, despite its chronic lack of resources, regulated the educational sector and held the ability to exercise different forms of legitimacy pressure on NAEAL. The pressures were managed through complying with laws and regulations, conforming to normative and cultural-cognitive expectations, and through complementing the MoE's efforts in adult education. Some form of agency was exercised through influencing policies and thereby manipulating the overall context of adult education. NAEAL also buffered its independence through networking with other actors.

Chapter six introduces the donors that drew their power from the financial resources they possess and from the immaterial resources that originate from the field of development cooperation. Complying with contracts and conforming to donor expectations related to proper practices and artefacts were the main strategies used. However, the portrayal of compliance also occurred, along with attempts to influence the donors to adopt locally suitable tools and strategies. A locally embedded strategy of taking care of the NAEAL family also emerged.

Chapter seven is dedicated to the communities where NAEAL worked. The communities' legitimacy demands were met by managerial strategies described as brokerage and patronage. In addition, NAEAL and the communities actively engaged in co-creating responses to donor requirements.

Chapter eight concludes the study by synthesizing the findings of chapters five, six and seven into five main managerial strategies. These are as follows: Conforming to local NGOing; Influencing; Striving for independence; Conforming to local cultural-cognitive expectations; and Co-creating responses to legitimacy audiences' own legitimacy pressures. Reflections on the main organizational changes are made. Finally, the limitations of the study as well as its potential contribution to organizational institutionalism and NGO management studies are presented together with suggestions for further research.

2 THEORETICAL APPROACH: ORGANIZATIONAL FIELD, LEGITIMACY AND MANAGING LEGITIMACY WITH MULTIPLE AUDIENCES

In this chapter, I introduce the main theoretical concepts used in this study. The study follows the line of modern sociological institutionalism (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Powell & DiMaggio 1991; Scott 2001) that sees people and organizations affected, or constructed, by their social environment and the institutions that prevail in it. Organizational institutionalism sheds light on the importance of institutions and related processes within organizational fields and organizations in particular (Greenwood et al. 2008). More specifically, this study draws from the ideas on institutional complexity (Greenwood et al. 2011) that embrace the coexistence of multiple institutions and different views on legitimate behaviours, as these resonate with the situation of a Southern NGO in the intersection of the field of development cooperation and the local context.

My research contributes to research on the management of development NGOs, which has its controversies. Within the development NGO community, the question of how development NGOs should be managed has not received a straightforward answer and the relevance of management in itself might be questioned or related to managerialism or donor requirements that might be seen as harmful (Lewis 2019). Studies on NGO management in development have been influenced by different fields of management studies ranging from business management, public management, and development management to third sector management, with none of them presenting satisfying answers to the specificities of development NGOs (Lewis 2019).

To broaden the understanding of development NGOs and their managerial decisions, I propose the addition of organizational institutionalism to the theoretical toolbox for research on NGO management in a development context. Explicit use of organizational institutionalism is a fairly recent phenomenon in the study of development NGOs (Lister 2003; Ramanth 2009; Elbers & Arts 2011; Watkins et al. 2012; Claeyé 2014; Claeyé & Jackson 2012; Fejerskov 2015, 2016, 2018a, 2018b; Kontinen 2018; Kontinen & Onali 2017), although Anheier (1990) proposed its inclusion in the study of development organizations already at the beginning of the 1990s. At that time, there was an increase in research on NGOs in development that followed the expansion of NGO involvement in development activities (Edwards & Hulme 1996, 1997; Smillie 1995; Fowler 1997; Hulme & Edwards 1996; Tvedt 1998; Van Rooy 1998).

In the following sections, I explore the analytical concepts of organizational field, legitimacy, legitimacy audiences, and organizational responses provided by organizational institutionalism, and discuss them as a contribution to the literature on development NGOs. Firstly, for this study development cooperation is considered an organizational field with specific ideas, norms, symbolic elements as well as social mechanisms that shape organizations over time. Isomorphic forces within the organizational field drive organizations towards similarity as the legitimacy requirements are common for all (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). However, as organizations have different reactions to field-level pressures, isomorphism is not perfect (Scott 2008, 149). Secondly, legitimacy is defined as the perception that the other actors within the organizational field have of an organization and its fit to the field (Suchmann 1995). Different types of legitimacy are introduced together with the concept of legitimacy audiences as the actors that assess the legitimacy of an organization. Thirdly, the pressures for legitimacy stemming from the expectations of multiple legitimacy audiences (Pache & Santos 2010) and the organizational responses including management strategies and activities are discussed. Finally, the main concepts are drawn together.

2.1 Development cooperation as an organizational field

In the development research literature, there has been a need to understand individual NGOs in different countries as a part of a larger international constellation centred around the notion and practices of development. This global context has been conceptualized in several ways, for example, as aid chain (Wallace et al. 2007), developmental configuration (Olivier de Sardan 2005), and aid system (Tvedt 1998; 2006; 2007).

The aid chain approach (Wallace et al. 2007) follows up on how funding flows from donors to NGOs and finally to local communities. The parts of the chain exchange different kinds of resources with each other, which can be financial, social, or cultural capital assets, and the actors are dependent on these assets. The approach also suggests that financial resources come with accountability requirements that do not allow for local interpretations and realities to be incorporated into the work. To survive, NGOs adopt the managerial requirements and donor fashions that end up promoting bureaucracy through increased professionalism. Wallace et al. (2007) conclude that the engagement with donor requirements diverts attention away from local realities, and NGOs are likely to lose contact and credibility with their constituencies.

Olivier de Sardan (2005) uses the concept of developmentalist configuration. He defines the developmentalist configuration to be "a cosmopolitan world of experts, bureaucrats, NGO personnel, researchers, technicians, project chiefs and field agents who make a living, so to speak, out of developing other people, and who, to this end, mobilize and manage a considerable amount of material and symbolic resources” (Olivier de Sardan 2005, 25). The publicly expressed purpose of development cooperation is to help communities and poor people in the global South to have a better life. Olivier de Sardan (2005) sees development as the objective that this entity of people enhances and puts their time, money, and talent into. At the same time, they secure their livelihood in the process. According to Olivier de Sardan, all the actors within the developmentalist configuration, including the ones that are being developed in the process, have stakes and interests that they advance. This leads to selection and side-tracking in projects as people try to satisfy their needs that may not have been captured by the blueprint version of the project. This creates unintended outcomes from the project’s point of view.

Kontinen (2007) provides further examples of this phenomenon. For example, when farming was introduced as a means of livelihood for retired civil servants in Tanzania, the participants used the workshops provided by the project on improvement of farming techniques as a space for their networking and ended up starting consultancies and NGOs instead of going into farming.

Tvedt (1998) proposes that development NGOs are part of an international aid system that comprises funding channels, trends, and practices, including the buzzwords in use, as well as the various interrelated actors that are dependent on each other. For Tvedt (1998, 77), this international social system has clear boundaries that are marked by the financial resources that originate outside of the system from the parliaments or the general public. Inter-relationships within the system are grounded in the transfer of resources that are given as a gift, but that are not, however, given for free (Tvedt 1998). They come with a requirement of information that will be converted into prestige and social capital through the image creation process within the system (Tvedt 1998; Ebrahim 2003). This can also be seen as the interdependence between the parts of the system as well as part of the legitimating character of the system as the different actors contribute value to others to keep the system alive (Morgan 2005). As the entry to the system is restricted and only the formally established NGOs can access the funds, the entrants adopt the forms and the language used within the system. Tvedt sees this as a result of “Western economic and political power and discursive hegemony” (Tvedt 1998, 214).

In Tvedt’s understanding, SNGOs are affected by the aid system, or they may even be a product of it. Donor states have a close relationship to the NGOs that they are funding institutionally, financially, and conceptually which gives rise to a DOSTANGO (donor states and NGOs) sub-system (Tvedt 2006). At the same time, the national and local contexts shape the way NGOs work as they interact with local institutions, governments, and people (Tvedt 1998, 4). Locally, NGOs function as a transmission belt that introduces donor language and Western concepts of development to the national context (Tvedt 1998, 4). The actors are socialized into the system via conferences and seminars and other communication exchanges where they learn the same language and other symbolic orders (Tvedt 1998, 77). These are also used to reduce differences and conflicts as the aid system is marked with inequalities of power and resources (Tvedt 2007, 44) that create and reproduce the practices and relationships within the aid system (Tvedt 1998, 75–76). Tvedt refers in his early work to the aid system as an organizational field (Tvedt 1998, 76) but rejects this idea in his later work where he considers the concept of "field" to be too loose (Tvedt 2007, 37). He sees the aid system to be closed because of the difficulty new members have in entering the donor-led system of financial flows. He also claims that the issue of power is better dealt with within the idea of the aid system.

In this study, however, instead of using the notions of aid chain, developmentalist configuration, or international aid system, I will draw on the concept of an organizational field because it provides a solid theoretical background and allows for an interchange with other fields of inquiry. The concept of organizational field has been used, for instance, in reference to art museums in the United States (DiMaggio 1991), music industry (Anand & Watson 2004), and transnational climate policy (Schüssler et al. 2014).

The notion of organizational field refers to a group of organizations that are connected within a common meaning system and are part of networks of relationships with each other (Scott 1995) and "constitute a recognized area of institutional life – e.g. producing similar services or goods" (DiMaggio & Powell 1983, 148). The actions of organizations within a certain field are influenced by institutions.

Institutions imply social behaviours that repeat themselves in a more or less taken-for-granted manner. These behaviours are based on "normative systems and cognitive understandings that give meaning to social exchange and thus enable self-reproducing social order" (Greenwood et al. 2008, 4–5). Institutions provide order and stability as they endure time. As institutions are transferred from generation to generation, they provide a longer-term understanding of what is considered appropriate behaviour in a society. At the same time, institutions reduce uncertainty because they enable people to predict the outcomes of their actions and the limits of the opportunities that they have within the society (Scott 2014, 57). In addition, organizations need to consider institutions that prevail in their environment and conform to the "rules, norms and ideologies of the wider society" (Meyer & Rowan 1977, 84).

An organizational field consists of relational systems that join organizations together so that they are aware of being involved in a joint undertaking and they interact intensively with other organizations within the field. Part of this interaction consists of information flows within the field, but also the relations of power and control that emerge within the field that inflict the process of structuration within the field. (DiMaggio & Powell 1983, 148.)

Ultimately, an organizational field is more of an empirical question (Scott 2014, 223), and its validation depends on the degree of interaction and connectedness between the actors. As noted by Fejerskov (2015), the organizational field of development cooperation is a relatively established one.

Organizations that produce "development" in developing countries and engage with local populations as the "end-users" of this product, populate the organizational field of development cooperation. These various actors share common goals of promoting development and reducing poverty. The field is filled with rules and principles that are internalized by all actors and adherence to these forms the basis for being considered a legitimate actor within this particular field. These actors range from governments, ministries, aid agencies, consultancy companies, international and local NGOs, to community-based organizations and they form intricate networks and relationships between them.

The aid chain mentioned above is an illustration of the links between the different actors within the field of development cooperation. Especially the ones that are closest to each other upwards and downwards in the aid chain engage in various kinds of exchanges to maintain and enhance each other's position within the constellation. An organization may, however, be involved in various relationships simultaneously both vertically and horizontally. The conceptual trends that involve their respective buzzwords and practices are another significant feature of development cooperation (Tvedt 1998). The language of development is filled with aspirations and goals that are rarely scrutinized and can therefore be used to enhance various agendas (Cornwall 2007).

A major source of institutionalization within the field is the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC), which defines and regulates development cooperation among its members and sets the norms also for many non-DAC members that aspire to be considered legitimate actors in the field (Gulrajani & Swiss 2019). Recently, the United Nations has been setting the norms and principles through the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (2000), the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005), and the Sustainable Development Goals (2015), which have all influenced the work of both governments and NGOs alike within the field of development cooperation.

2.1.1 Isomorphism within an organizational field

Non-governmental organizations engaged in development are rather similar all over the world. Organizations within the same organizational field tend to resemble each other as they adapt to similar institutional expectations. According to Meyer and Rowan (1977, 352), the motivation for resemblance comes from the legitimacy requirement as an organization seeks to have a justification for its existence and survival within the organizational field. In its search for legitimacy, organizations tend, therefore, to adopt goals and practices that are common in a particular context. Adoption of the field-specific structures signals rationality, even though it might not enhance organizational efficiency (DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Signalling rationality is especially important for organizations that have unclear goals and produce outputs that are difficult to measure (Greenwood et al. 2008, 6).

The resemblance is thought to be caused by structural elements within the institutional context that influence organizational change through coercive, normative, and mimetic isomorphic forces (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott 2001).

Coercive isomorphism refers to a situation of authority and power. This could be the case of legal demands by the state or, for example, of dependency from another organization that implies conformity to the formal and informal requirements of that organization. This kind of organization holds power over the other organizations within the field (Beckert 2010, 153), especially when there are only one or a few similar sources of resources within an organizational field. At this point, organizations start to resemble each other (DiMaggio & Powell 1983).

Claeyé and Jackson (2012) relate coercive isomorphism within development cooperation to funding relationships and donor requirements. Northern donor agencies are conditioned by various international commitments, such as the Millennium or Sustainable Development Goals, principles that the OECD/DAC members are required to follow, and national laws of the donor countries. In addition to these, there are various technologies, such as results-based management, tools related to project cycle management, approaches to rights, empowerment, and monitoring and evaluation, that condition the way development interventions are organized and discussed. These requirements find their way to country offices and partners in developing countries via the aid chain (Wallace et. al. 2007). SNGOs can be highly dependent on the financial resources coming from the donors. To attract these funds, SNGOs need to comply with the application and reporting formats the donors require and master the terminology used within the field of development cooperation.

A common legal framework within a sector can also be a very standardizing factor. Developing country governments pass NGO laws that include various registration requirements. These range from documentation of an organization's vision, statutes, and activities to office space and signposts to annual reporting formats.

Normative isomorphism (DiMaggio & Powell 1983) is related to professionalization and standardization. People working within a certain organizational field usually share a similar educational background and professional networks spread ideas and models within the field. Within development cooperation, normative isomorphism is spread through the numerous capacity-building initiatives, training courses, and workshops that have similar content no matter on which continent they are delivered. These events serve as places of socialization for the field as the participants learn the language used by development professionals and the various practices that are considered as the best ways of working within development. (Becker 2010, 155.)

Mimetic isomorphism occurs when organizations adopt solutions that other organizations that are considered successful and legitimate within the field are using. Their policies, organizational forms, and structures, also called "templates for organizing" (DiMaggio & Powell 1991, 27), are copied. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) relate mimetic isomorphism especially to sectors where goals are ambiguous, and the environment is not stable. This resonates well with the situation in the field of development cooperation that operates in insecure contexts with limited knowledge and information, but entertain aspirational goals that are hard to achieve, especially in a situation where different actors might have differing interests.

One example of institutional isomorphism in the field of development cooperation is the diffusion of the concept of capacity building (Kühl 2009). The World Bank started to promote capacity building as a "new mode of activities" in the early 1990s. This coincided with a UNDP study that found various problems with technical cooperation and recommended training for personnel.

As both of these organizations are very important in the "global market of ideas" and they could be considered change agents, or institutional entrepreneurs, in the field of development cooperation, the concept started to diffuse through coercive isomorphism. The second process of diffusion, mimetic isomorphism, took place when the concept started to spread from one actor to another. Normative isomorphism took place first more slowly through professional bodies and later on with accelerated speed through the whole field as individuals and organizations strived to maintain their reputation as professional and well-informed actors and therefore felt obliged to take in the new concept. (Kühl 2009, 564-565.)

2.1.2 Diversity within an organizational field

Within the literature of organizational institutionalism, however, it has been identified that isomorphic forces do not mechanically shape organizations. That is, organizations do have agency when it comes to the institutional prescriptions of the field (Greenwood et al. 2011). First, organizations may react differently to institutional demands and therefore isomorphism will not be perfect (Scott 2008, 149). Second, organizations may also either imitate the field imperfectly (Haunschild & Chandler 2013, 626) or they may adapt, or translate, the organizational practices so that they are easier to understand within the organization (Czarniawska & Joerges 1996). Third, most organizations are in a position that they are confronted with institutional complexity (Greenwood et al. 2011) in the form of possibly competing institutional logics, and these will affect their organizational responses towards field-level pressures. This is especially pronounced in development cooperation, because the context and logics at the local level differ greatly from the field level prescriptions.

First, the different reactions to institutional demands may be caused by differences between the characteristics of organizations and on how agile they are in changing their ways of working. Greenwood et al. (2011) have suggested that organizational attributes make each organization different. Organizational attributes, such as *field position, structure, ownership* or *governance,* and *identity,* also filter the way that an organization experiences the pressures from the institutional field and the ways that it can respond to those pressures (Greenwood et al. 2011).

Field position refers to an organization's proximity to the core of the field. Central organizations are well-established, visible, possibly large organizations with lots of resources and status. They get a lot of media attention, but they are also highly affected by the institutional pressures of their respective field.

Peripheral organizations are faced with fewer institutional expectations and can therefore be more flexible in their behaviour. (Greenwood et al. 2011, 339-340.) For example, a Southern NGO could be considered a peripheral organization within the field of development cooperation and it could manage with less conformity towards the field than the more established Northern donor organizations.

When they use the term *structure*, Greenwood et al. (2011, 342–344) refer mostly to the division of labour and the different groups within an organization. People and groups within an organization have different interests and degrees of influence as well as differing experiences of field-level pressures. These different groups bring with them norms they have learned from their educational background or prior working environments. Professional links to the field increase influence and create an opportunity to introduce field-level templates into the organization. Within the field of development cooperation, the expectation of professionalization and the capacity building offered by donors thickens the ties to the field for those staff members that have more interaction with the donor community and other local development workers.

The form of ownership and governance will also be reflected in how institutional complexity is dealt with. The examples in institutional literature describe differences between private and public hospitals or family-owned businesses that embrace community norms in addition to market norms. (Greenwood et al. 2011, 344.) As for development NGOs, Lewis (2007) divides them into two categories based on their form of governance. Membership-based organizations need to consider the views of the membership and the governing body the members elect. Non-membership-based organizations also have a governing body and the board of trustees is usually formed by voluntary individuals that receive no compensation for their services. Both types of NGOs are accountable to the laws of the country they operate in.

An identity helps to interpret and respond to external demands, while a strong sense of identity enhances an organization's ability to ignore them or to take a more conscious decision to comply with them (Greenwood et al. 2011, 348). At the institutional level, organizations belong to a certain category with a collective identity, which can be emphasized by, for example, choosing a name that expresses this category (Greenwood et al. 2011, 346-347). The name may at the same time express difference from other organizations. For example, the National Adult Education Association of Liberia indicates that the organization has a nationwide reach and it specializes in adult education. Watkins et al. (2012) claim that development NGOs are in general unclear of their identities because they follow the donor money and have vague objectives and generic tools that can be applied to a range of types of interventions.

Ramanath (2009) points out that path dependency is a major constraining or, at the least, a delaying element to isomorphism, as institutional arrangements are rather fixed. Path-dependant factors may include commitment to the values of the organization and to the knowledge and technologies that have been used in the past as well as to how the organization has been structured and financed

(Ramanath 2009, 67). This means that adaptation is not very easy, at least in the short run. Ramanath (2009) also found that resource constraints are a limiting factor for isomorphism, since NGOs need to find different solutions to these constraints. In doing so, they become more differentiated from each other and other organizations within the field of development cooperation than they are similar.

A second way to cope with the pressures from the organizational field is translation (Czarniawska and Joerges 1996), which occurs when organizational practices that travel within the organizational field are adapted to make sense within one's organization. This sensemaking produces models and ideas that suit the local conditions, which means they may be different from one place to another. When organizations are slow in adapting to new ideas and do it only to conform to the legitimacy requirements of the sector, they copy practices without considering their relevance and suitability to their own organization (Haunschild and Chandler 2013, 639). This leads to imperfect imitation that may have only a slight resemblance to the original idea that started to circulate within the organizational field.

Some organizations and actors facilitate the diffusion of ideas within organizational fields. This is prominent within development cooperation that caters to capacity-building organizations and consultants that engage in facilitating the entry of new ideas into the field. However, while local organizations are actively involved in these exercises they adapt and mould the ideas according to their own understandings and interests, and the result may be quite different from the original idea the facilitator had in mind (Kontinen 2018).

Ideas and techniques that circulate within organizational fields may have a background in a specific ideology that may not be taken into consideration when adapting them (Sahlin & Wedlin 2008, 227). This may lead to a gradual identity change within an organization if it is not aware of the programmatic ideas behind technical elements.

A third factor that tones down isomorphic tendencies is the influence of different logics organizations have to deal with (Lister 2003; Claeyé & Jackson 2012), since the legitimacy demands that an organization faces can stem from diverse and even contradictory institutional logics. Thornton and Ocasio (2008, 101) defined institutional logics as "the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules by which individuals produce and reproduce their material subsistence, organize time and space and provide meaning to their social reality". The emphasis is on the social construction of institutional rules and practices that influence both human and organizational behaviour (Thornton & Ocasio 2008, 101, 105). As most organizations are subject to multiple institutional logics (Scott 2014, 224) they need to find ways to navigate between them.

Development cooperation has changed from the transfer of technology towards moulding people's minds, their behaviour, and their organizations and institutions according to the institutional logics of the mainly Northern donors (Hammack & Heydemann 2009). There are various logics within the field of development cooperation, such as the logic of results management, or cost-effectiveness, or the logic of gender equality and women's empowerment, that may also conflict with each other (Fejerskov 2016, 2183). These logics enter the local NGOs through their contacts with the donors and the many capacity-building efforts provided by the donors.

However, for local NGOs, the institutional logics of the donors and those that prevail in the local context may be very different. Institutional changes that are brought from the outside with little understanding of the local institutions that govern people's lives (Kelsall 2008; Olivier de Sardan 1999) may be translated or edited (Czarniawska & Joerges 1996) to better fit the local context or they may be absorbed into the existing institutions and logics of, for example, patronage and clientelism (Burchardt 2013).

Hybridization has been identified as one of the coping mechanisms in a situation of multiple institutional logics (Pache & Santos 2010; Billis 2010; Laitinen 2018). In the development context, this has meant, for example, that the internal functions of an NGO are differentiated between fundraising and project work (Kontinen et al. 2015) or between contacts to clients and investors in a microcredit organization where development logic and banking logic are combined to form a hybrid identity (Battilana & Dorado 2010).

Over time the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the actors may change due to new experiences, and this will make an institution change. Every now and then, there are also special agents of change, or institutional entrepreneurs, which can have a major effect on an institution and modify it, or create new ones (Haunschild and Chandler 2013, 626). Usually, these institutional entrepreneurs have access to resources they can harness for their self-interests (DiMaggio 1988). The movement therefore goes both ways, and in the long run organizations need to conform to the institutional environment, but they can also create and modify meanings that can bring about institutional change (Scott 2014, 223).

An interesting example of isomorphic tendencies has been provided by Fejerskov (2015), who studied the entry of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation into the field of development cooperation. Initially, this foundation worked only in the United States but started its global programmes in 2006. At first, it stayed quite deliberately on the outskirts of the field. However, with the entry of professionals with development cooperation experience and the knowledge of appropriate practices within the field, normative isomorphism took place and the foundation changed its ways of thinking and working in line with the ways of the field. Gradually, the foundation became an important actor within the field and started to participate in the rule setting through its work on guidelines and other standard-setting processes. The foundation is very wealthy, and it has gained important footing within the field. As this example shows, there is usually room for agency within an organizational field, and rules may be ignored or re-negotiated. The example of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation also sheds light on the power issue. It helps to become an institutional entrepreneur and employ agency if you have the ideas, money, and other resources to engage with the field.

2.1.3 The power issue

Power is a key issue for development practice and theory. Several frameworks have been developed to analyse power in development interventions and relationships. One of the most used ones in development practice is by VeneKlassen and Miller (2002), which discuss power in terms of *power over*, *power to*, *power with* and *power within*, or *power for*. *Power over* refers to power as control and domination. *Power with* implies finding common ground and collective strength. *Power to* and *within* are more personal. They suggest the potential that every person has to shape his or her life and world. *Power within* refers to one's sense of self-worth. (VeneKlassen & Miller 2002, 55.)

Another approach aimed at facilitating power analysis in development initiatives, the power cube, was developed by Gaventa (2006) based on the three dimensions of power introduced by Lukes (2005, original 1974, referred to in Gaventa 2006). Lukes (2005) identified three dimensions of power: decision-making power, non-decision-making power, and ideological power. People and institutions exercise decision-making power visibly, while the non-decision-making power of powerful bodies and agents keeps certain issues off the agenda. Ideological power refers to the norms, institutions, languages, and behaviours that have been internalized to an extent that they may unconsciously be accepted even if they contradict the interests of the dominated. (Scott-Villiers & Osterom, 2016, 1-3.) Gaventa (2006) refers to these as visible, hidden, and invisible forms of power and adds different levels (global, national, local) and different spaces (closed, invited, claimed/created) to the power cube. It has been applied for analysis in development practice over the years (Pantazidou 2012, Gaventa 2021). As noted by Gaventa (2021, 16), the different dimensions of power are nested and interact with one another in ways that may strengthen the power of the powerful but can also be harnessed by less powerful groups to initiate change.

Within the more theoretical development literature, power dynamics in development cooperation projects draw, for example, on the work of Michel Foucault (Ferguson 1994, Cooke & Kothari 2001, Rossi 2004). According to this approach, development discourse is embedded in relations of power with mainly foreign experts holding the knowledge that is considered valuable (Ebrahim 2003). However, it has also been suggested that despite the domination of the logics of development projects people manipulate and localize them to get what matters for them (Rossi 2004) or use forms of cultural resistance and non-cooperation (Scott 1985) to even out the power difference.

Additionally, Pierre Bourdieu's ideas of power as a culturally and symbolically created interplay between agency and structure has been used, for example, by Navarro (2006) to study the Brazilian landless movement and by Moncrieffe (2006) to study street children in Haiti. Ebrahim (2003) sees symbolic capital and power associated with expertise and knowledge production as essential within international development. According to Ebrahim (2003), donors depend on NGOs for information and reputation and therefore the two are interdependent, which diminishes the unidirectional power of donors. Within development studies, power and empowerment have recently been seen as a complex, multidimensional societal process that is influenced by social norms and constraints, but also as opportunities to change those very same constraints (McGee & Pettit 2020; Gaventa 2021).

Within organizational institutionalism, agency and power are contested issues and institutionalists have been critiqued for not engaging sufficiently with these concepts (Clegg 2010; Claeyé & Jackson 2012, 614-615). Especially in the field of international development cooperation, power relations are constantly present in the form of financial resource imbalance and the ways that donors control other actors through granting projects and continuously monitoring and evaluating them (Fejerskov 2018).

Within organizational institutionalism, the power of organizations or individuals as well as their interests and identities are structured by the taken-for-granted nature of institutions. According to Lawrence (2008, 170), institutions need to be powerful to exist and to be able to influence the beliefs and behaviours of actors and organizations. A central feature of the power of institutions is the capacity of institutions to activate controls if the legitimate patterns of practice are not followed. However, institutions also change and actors and organizations influence institutions by maintaining or by disrupting them.

Lawrence and Buchanan (2017, 480) see power as a relational phenomenon that has two basic modes. First, episodic power is discrete and includes strategic acts of mobilization. Second, systemic power works through routine practices that have been put in place through socialization, technological systems, accreditation procedures, and so forth.

These forms of power are then attached to institutional dynamics of institutional agency and institutional control (Lawrence & Buchanan 2017, 480). Institutional agency is about creating, transforming, or disrupting institutions through influence or force by engaging in episodic forms of power. Institutional agency and the power that it uses are intentional and involve decisions that are based on the actor’s interests. Examples include the way lobbyists influence political decision-making, or how the police may use force to keep certain groups out of sight and remove their opportunities to voice their opinions. (Lawrence & Buchanan 2017, 494.)

Institutional control stems from systemic forms of power. These involve regulations and norms, but also the taken-for-granted understandings and powerful myths (Meyer & Rowan 1977) that set the rules of the game in any particular field without any single actor enforcing them. The isomorphic forces (DiMaggio & Powell 1983) described earlier are an example of such regulative mechanisms. According to Lawrence and Buchanan (2017, 484-486), systemic power works through discipline and domination. Drawing on Foucault, they describe discipline as the power that works through everyday practices and shapes the identity of subjects. Domination for them is a subtle and invisible form of power that is embedded in the ways that society controls the population through statistics, tests, and the likes that predict our behaviour, makes it easier to control the population and limits the alternatives available for people. (Lawrence & Buchanan 2017, 485-487.)

The above-mentioned ideas on visible, hidden, and invisible forms of power drawn from Lukes (2005) are also present in Lawrence and Buchanan's (2017, 481) conceptualization. In addition to visible forms of power that are mainly present in institutional agency, hidden forms of power are also exercised when things are kept away from decision-making arenas and invisible forms of power can exist without observable conflict, or by securing people's compliance through controlling people's minds.

Institutional resistance might be geared towards institutional control, but also towards institutional agency, as in resisting change within an organizational field. For example, organizational responses toward field-level pressures can involve compromise, avoidance, defiance, and manipulation (Oliver 1991) that limit institutional control. Sometimes it may be in the interest of actors to resist change and to maintain institutions. This type of resistance is also an ongoing process that requires active engagement and the policing of compliance. (Lawrence 2008, 189-190.)

Although the systemic power embedded in the institutional control of the field of development cooperation shapes the interaction between donor organizations and the local recipient organizations, there are also covered tactics that local actors use in translating and changing the purposes of development interventions (Fejerskov 2018a, 141; Kontinen 2007). For example, in the case of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Fejerskov (2018a) argues, that the neoliberal instrumental logic rarely made it to the implementation phase as local actors induced transformational changes to the interventions. The same was true for Swedish NGOs and their partners in Costa Rica and Nicaragua that used organizational development to legitimize their practice without truly engaging with it (Segnestam Larsson 2011).

The power within organizations is unevenly distributed. Influential individuals and groups may increase their relative power by engaging with peers within the organizational field and by introducing field-level logics into the organization (Greenwood et al. 2011, 345). In a Southern NGO, the executive director is usually the most powerful person. Due to the influences from the field of development cooperation, I claim that financial administrators, monitoring, evaluation specialists, and programme administrators, are becoming more powerful in comparison to the field staff that engages with the so-called beneficiaries.

In this study, I understand power as embedded in institutions. The systemic forms of power as presented by Lawrence and Buchanan (2017) may make itself visible in laws and regulations, but it can also be hidden or invisible within norms and taken-for-granted understandings.

2.2 Organizational legitimacy and legitimacy audiences

Legitimacy is an important concept within organizational institutionalism, in which it explains the mere existence and survival of organizations. According to organizational institutionalism, organizations need to strive to gain and maintain legitimacy within their respective organizational field. The most cited definition of legitimacy is the one by Suchman (1995, 574) stating that legitimacy is "a generalized perception that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper and appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions". Deephouse and Suchman (2008, 52) note that the definition captures how the societal beliefs that emanate from the institutional level become part of organizations, and how the organization can strategically manage legitimacy to further its goals.

Legitimacy is considered as something that comes from outside of the organization, from the legitimating environment, and from the stakeholders that assess the organization (Deephouse & Suchman 2008, 54). From an institutionalist perspective, an NGO would be an object whose acceptability is under assessment. Sources of legitimacy would not be the NGO's own actions, but the internal and external stakeholders, or legitimacy audiences as Suchmann (1995) calls them, that revolve around the organization and evaluate if they consider the organization to be legitimate.

In the NGO management literature, the concept of legitimacy has been used in ways different from organizational institutionalism, the underlying idea being that an NGO can influence its own legitimacy by resorting to different actions that would increase accountability, representativeness, and performance (Lister 2003, 177; see also Brown & Jagadananda 2007), which have been considered to be the three building blocks of NGO legitimacy.

First of all, accountability has been defined as 'the means by which individuals and organizations report to a recognized authority (or authorities) and are held responsible for their actions' (Edwards and Hulme 1996, 8). This definition points out that accountability occurs within a relationship with someone that has got authority over the organization. Accountability entails an element of control, as the organization will be held responsible for its actions. Finally, there is also a report on the action which can be taken to refer to accounts, reports, and other forms of evidence of the organization's performance. (Hilhorst 2003, 125.)

NGOs are accountable to multiple actors: upwards to donors, downwards to clients and beneficiaries and they have the responsibility to themselves, that is, to the organization's mission and staff. The relationships between the actors and power that each of them can exercise on others define who is able to hold whom accountable. NGOs have been claimed to have closer relationships with the donors than with their constituents (Hulme & Edwards 1967, 280-281; Banks et al. 2015). Although the asymmetries in resources have a major role in influencing who can hold whom to account, the weaker actors do have other means of social control that can be used to hold also the powerful accountable.

Secondly, representation has been seen as part of NGO legitimacy. NGOs claim to be representing the poor and disadvantaged in their dealings with donors and advocacy work towards the broader public or towards the government. There has rarely been, however, consultation to acquire the consent of those that NGOs are advocating for and this has raised questions about who the NGOs actually represent (Lister 2003, 177).

Thirdly, good performance in achieving their goals and in contributing to lasting positive changes in people's lives are features of legitimate NGOs. However, there is still no consensus on whether NGOs are magic bullets that have a distinct comparative advantage to tackle grass-roots problems or whether they have little impact because of small and scattered interventions (Lewis 2007, 160–161; Riddell 2007).

Each of these three aspects opens up vast fields of discussion that have either a rather technical orientation of how NGOs should organize their structures and activities or a normative orientation as to how NGOs should conduct themselves in relation to different stakeholder groups. They are also intertwined with the multiple roles, relationships, and moral obligations that NGOs have and that might conflict with each other (Edwards & Hulme 1996; Jordan & Van Tuijl 2007; Najam 1996).

2.2.1 Different types of legitimacy

The nature of legitimacy has been studied within management literature and three distinct patterns have been emerging, that is, legitimacy as property, process, or perception (Suddaby et al. 2017). Egholm et al. (2019) build on Suddaby et al.'s (2017) work and note that similarly to management literature, the NGO literature treats legitimacy mainly as a property that is derived from the external environment and that legitimacy is necessary for an organization's survival. Egholm et al. (2019) suggest an addition to Suddaby et al.'s (2017) categories that would see legitimacy as relations in processes. With this they mean that legitimacy would be constantly under negotiation within specific contexts and in equal relationships and the concept would derive meaning from practice and concrete situations.

The idea of legitimacy as embedded in relationships and under constant negotiation in everyday practices is something that resonates with the field of development cooperation. How different actors manage their relationships within the aid chain has been a major concern within the NGO management literature (Ebrahim 2003; Wallace et al. 2007; Eyben 2010), and this relational nature of legitimacy is important, because each organization has various legitimacy audiences it needs to consider simultaneously. For example, donors have to fulfil the legitimacy requirements from their own back donor, and this affects their relationships with the local implementers. This also resonates with Gabbioneta et al.'s (2013, reference in Deephouse et al. 2017, 39) finding that as organizations are connected to each other within a sector and across sectors, they influence each other, often unintentionally.

For the purposes of this study, I mostly follow Deephouse et al.'s (2017, 39–40) four-fold categorization of legitimacy, which consists of regulatory, pragmatic, normative, and cultural-cognitive forms of legitimacy.

For this study and the analysis of SNGOs, I consider *regulative legitimacy* to refer to the "degree to which an organization complies with explicit regulative processes" (Scott 1995, 42). Regulative legitimacy entails conformity to laws, rules, and regulations as well as regulatory institutions (Scott 1995). Here legislation and the government institutions become important, as they control the legal and regulatory requirements for local NGOs, including granting the status of a legal NGO. Other factors related to regulative legitimacy could be appropriate governance and financial management systems.

In a study on NGO legitimacy, Lister (2003) focused on Northern NGOs (NNGO) and the tools that they used in their relationships with various legitimacy audiences and different types of legitimacy. Most of their stakeholders considered that financial accountability, appropriate governance and the legal requirements for charitable status or registration in the country where the NNGO operated were important. These can be considered as requirements for regulatory legitimacy.

The second type of legitimacy, *pragmatic legitimacy*, is related to the practical benefits that the organization produces and to the instrumental value that legitimacy audiences derive from them. The assessment of a legitimacy audience is based on self-interest. Power-dependence relationships are present in this form of legitimacy construction. An organization may also seek, for example, to integrate legitimacy audiences into its structures to influence them and to adopt their standards of performance to appear responsive to the legitimacy audience's interests. Another form of pragmatic legitimacy is the personification of organizations. An organization can be seen to possess goals and styles that are valued and that give the impression that the organization has the legitimacy audience's best interests at heart. Successful impression management will allow minor failures to be forgiven. (Suchman 1995, 578-579.)

In the above-mentioned study on NNGOs by Lister (2003), she found some variation in pragmatic legitimacy. For back donors, it was important that the NNGO had functioning links to deliver services in the South and private supporters appreciated the opportunity for giving. SNGOs, governments, and beneficiaries expected to receive efficient service delivery, but also funding, support, training, technical skills, and contacts.

The third type of legitimacy, *normative legitimacy*, is related to societal values and the benefits that an organization is considered to be producing. Normative legitimacy refers to the consideration of whether an organization "does the right things" and promotes social welfare that is in line with the legitimacy audiences' values. Legitimacy audiences will make judgements concerning the organization's outputs and results, techniques, and procedures, structures, and categories. However, this can be achieved by adopting techniques and procedures that prevail in the organizational field and projecting an image of effectiveness instead of actual performance. Charismatic leadership is also a form to gain normative legitimacy among legitimacy audiences. (Suchman 1995, 581-582.)

In Lister's (2003) study, conforming to normative ideals included poverty reduction for most of the stakeholders. Donors wished to see an efficient organization. Private supporters as well as Southern partners were inclined to look for ideological similarities with their worldviews or missions. However, Southern governments and local beneficiaries wished to refrain from ideological overtones.

The fourth type of legitimacy, *cultural-cognitive legitimacy* (Scott 2014, 67), is embedded in the cultural context that shapes the mental processes of legitimacy audiences. It is based on cognition and it can either make the social world more comprehensible or be part of the mere existence of the social order (Suchman 1995, 582-583). How much an organization is taken for granted within its environment varies significantly across different contexts as, according to Scott (2014, 68), cultural-cognitive elements of institutions are embedded in cultural systems that operate through multiple levels and are nested within each other.

While pragmatic legitimacy requires the fulfilment of legitimacy audiences' interests through tangible rewards, normative and cultural-cognitive legitimacy are based on cultural rules that are harder to manipulate. Therefore, the latter forms of legitimacy are more profound and more durable. (Suchman 1995, 582–583.)

Coming back to Lister's (2003) study on Northern NGOs, cultural-cognitive legitimacy included cultural appropriateness, but this meant different things for different groups. Donors expected the NNGO to work within the current development paradigm, which included, for example, the use of the right kind of language and seeing aid as something inherently good. Empowerment is part of the development buzzword lexicon, and that was expected also by SNGOs and local beneficiaries. In addition to that, respectful relationships, equality, and understanding of the local context were expected by the local partner organizations. Southern governments and beneficiaries valued contextual or cultural appropriateness. (Lister 2003, 180-181.)

It should be noted that all these concepts are analytical and difficult to distinguish empirically and can occur in combinations (Deephouse et al. 2017, 40). Keeping this in mind, I will use the four types of legitimacy as analytical tools to analyse the actions of the case study organization towards possible regulatory, pragmatic, normative, or cultural-cognitive legitimacy pressures emanating from its various legitimacy audiences.

2.2.2 Legitimacy audiences

In this study, I use Suchman's (1995) concept of legitimacy audiences to indicate the stakeholders that are important in conferring legitimacy to an organization. For me, the word *audience* transmits the idea of acts and performances that are needed to fulfil the expectations of the most important stakeholders, that is, the legitimacy audiences.

Legitimacy audiences assess the legitimacy of an organization, consciously or not, based on the similarity between the characteristics of the organization and the expectations that the legitimacy audiences have for it (Deephouse et al. 2017, 36). Legitimacy audiences that are frequently mentioned are the state and its various agencies that regulate particular organizational fields, professions, and licensing boards, as well as the public and the media. Social movements, interest groups, and individuals can influence the assessment of an organization's legitimacy as well. It has also been noted that as actors within a specific field are connected to each other, they will affect each other's assessments. (Deephouse et al. 2017, 36–39.)

However, the identification of the significant legitimacy audiences is an empirical question; these can be examined from the point of view of any organization by focusing on what kind of audiences it interacts with, and how it builds legitimacy in this interaction. For example, when Lister (2003) studied legitimacy from an NNGO's point of view she identified various legitimacy audiences: donors, private supporters and the wider public and media, targets of advocacy, SNGOs, Southern governments, beneficiaries, and employees.

As NGOs have multiple legitimacy audiences that have different perceptions and interests when assessing the organization's legitimacy, this leads to differing expectations that are difficult to satisfy simultaneously. In the literature, SNGOs' relationships with their different stakeholders are mainly discussed separately (Ramanth 2009 on government; Elbers & Arts 2001 on donors) but I consider it important to observe the interactions that the differing expectations may create. For the Southern NGO, the legitimacy audience with the most power is usually the donor that controls the resources that are needed for the NGO's survival. In addition to the donors, state entities are important because they regulate the laws and regulations that govern the NGO sector in the country. The beneficiaries or communities that are the consumers of the development activities make up an important legitimacy audience that needs to be on board for the NGO to be able to perform its activities.

2.3 Organizational responses to pressures for legitimacy

Why does legitimacy matter? First, an organization needs legitimacy to access and enter a particular organizational field and then to maintain its position there. A major pressure for legitimacy at the organizational field level is the phenomenon of isomorphism that pushes organizations to adopt goals and practices that are common within the respective organizational field. (Meyer & Rowan 1977.) Second, legitimacy is needed for survival in the competition for resources of various types and the support of various legitimacy audiences (Deephouse et al. 2017, 34-35). An organization can revert to different kinds of managerial actions and strategies to cope with the pressures for legitimacy and it needs to alter and modify its actions at different times (Greenwood et al. 2011, 351).

The literature suggests that development organizations face pressures for legitimacy from two major sources. Firstly, there are the isomorphic pressures within the organizational field of development cooperation. For example, Fejerskov's (2015) study showed how the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation adopted field-level scripts as it established itself as a serious development actor. Secondly, there are the pressures coming directly from the major legitimacy audiences of an organization (Brinkerhoff 2005; Elbers & Arts 2011; Brown & Jagadananda 2007; Ramanath 2009). For example, concerning development NGOs, a study on institutional isomorphism in fourteen South African NGOs (Claeyé & Jackson 2012) showed that the local NGOs mimic the organizational structures and internalize the managerial thinking prevalent in the field of development cooperation to appear legitimate for donors.

The main challenges with legitimacy have been attached to gaining, maintaining, and repairing it (Suchman 1995). Initially, an organization needs to gain legitimacy within the institutional environment to be considered proper and fitting the standards, social values, and meaning systems. To do this, it is important to comply with the industry standards, ideals, and models. (Deephouse et al. 2017, 41, 44.) After establishing itself in the field, the organization needs to maintain the expected standards and protect its propriety. At this stage part of the legitimation process can be cognitive work that reinforces the legitimacy audiences' acceptance and projects a good picture of the organization. (Deephouse et al. 2017, 42, 44; Suchman 1995, 600.) In case of a rupture in the organization's legitimacy, it needs to repair its legitimacy through re-affirming the audiences of its performance and fit (Deephouse et al. 2017, 44). For example, to repair an organization's legitimacy it might part ways with a poor manager to clean its reputation (Suchman 1995, 600).

The ways that an organization responds to the different pressures for legitimacy are important in being perceived as legitimate within a certain organizational field or cultural context (Suchman 1995, 585–586). Drawing mainly on Oliver (1991), Suchman (1995), Najam (2000), Brinkerhoff (2005), Elbers and Arts (2011) I present here three broader types of managerial strategies that NGOs might revert to in their relations to the various legitimacy audiences. I have named them *Conforming, Influencing*, and *Striving for independence*.

Conforming

The managerial strategy of conforming implies, according to Suchman (1995, 587), that an organization positions itself within existing institutional regimes. This includes, for example, conforming to established models and standards, as well as to ideals and instrumental demands (Suchman 1995, 600). It also consists of laws, rules and regulations set by regulatory institutions. Oliver (1991) refers to conformity with acquiescence, meaning adaptation to the different institutional authorities and imitation of other organizations to gain legitimacy, avoid sanctions, and obtain more resources. Compromising (Oliver 1991) would be a suitable response in a situation where there are conflicting authorities present and the organization needs to balance and negotiate between these different institutional demands.

As we are talking about the specific field of development cooperation and, in this case, of a certain national context, this means that there are certain pre-existing legitimacy audiences that need to be considered. Government is usually among the major legitimacy audiences for local NGOs.

Najam's (2000) four-C framework – cooperation, co-optation, complementarity, and confrontation – describes four different ways to organize NGO-government relations depending on the similarity or dissimilarity of the goals and means that the actors have based on their institutional interests. In the case of similar goals and similar means, the NGO–government relationship is one of cooperation. If the actors have dissimilar goals, but similar means, the relationship is described as co-optation. Similar goals but with dissimilar means indicates complementarity. Finally, dissimilar goals and dissimilar means lead to confrontation. (Najam 2000, 383.)

The first three strategies include an element of mutual interests that is conducive to conforming to expectations. These elements were present in Ramanath's (2009) study of Indian NGOs that cooperated with the local government for providing housing for slum dwellers. Actions that the NGOs used in their dealings with the government included, for example, hiring former government officials to ease the communication with the government (Ramanath 2009, 71).

Brinkerhoff (2005) draws on studies of various types of Southern organizations ranging from hospitals to churches and NGOs. He found that conforming happened in the form of isomorphism, as in looking like other organizations by adopting structures, procedures, and systems that are common to local development organizations.

Influencing

In their study, Elbers and Arts (2011) noticed that influencing was used as a strategy to modify the contents of the donor conditions. Using the mutual dependence that donors have with the local NGOs, the local NGOs that were attractive and strong performers had some leverage in their negotiations with donors. Sometimes the donors could be persuaded with solid argumentation. This was especially true when there was already a trusting relationship and personal contacts in place. Involving donor representatives on a personal level, for example, on field trips and activities, was also a helpful tactic that created understanding beyond what could be drawn from formal reporting. Informing and communicating with styles and vocabularies that are considered legitimate by the different legitimacy audiences that require a certain type of communication style was found to be important by Brinkerhoff (2005).

Striving for independence

Striving for independence refers to the various managerial strategies found in the existing literature that range from subtle forms of avoidance to more active or outward-oriented ways to cope with institutional pressures and demands for legitimacy while protecting the organization from excessive outside influences.

According to (Oliver 1991), one way to tackle isomorphic pressures is to buffer the organization or parts of it from the institutional requirements while at the same time changing formal structures to signal conformity. Meyer and

Rowan (1977) noted that organizations may deliberately decouple symbolic practices from the organization's technical core but maintain ceremonial conformity. In development cooperation, a similar phenomenon is discussed in terms of the way development buzzwords and donor fashions (Cornwall 2007) are adopted into the vocabulary but not necessarily put into practice. Loose coupling (Meyer & Rowan 1977) would mean, for example, an establishment of special units within the organization that would take care of the outside pressure and allows the rest of the organization to continue business as usual. These structures may, however, start to transmit the demands from the context towards the organization (Scott 2008, 171). This has been the case of M&E professionals that have started to gain more footing within NGOs, even if they might have originally been hired to satisfy donor demands. However, conforming to donor demands on monitoring and evaluation, and informing them of the organization's activities, might be a form to demonstrate the willingness to commit to donor expectations while at the same time finding the acts of M&E futile for the functioning of the organization. (Brinkerhoff 2005, 8.)

Many of these elements were found by Elbers and Arts (2011) in their study of 41 SNGOs in Ghana and India on the organizations' strategic responses to donor constraints. Many of the leaders of SNGOs that Elbers and Arts (2011) interviewed reported using various strategies to engage actively with the conflicting donor pressures instead of just passively complying with them. *Avoiding* as a strategic response was used to select donors and reject the ones that were not compatible with the Southern NGOs' mode of operation and value base. SNGOs also terminated relationships with incompatible donors. *Buffering* was used to minimize the negative effects of donor constraints on the organization. This could include shielding parts of the organization from donor influence or compensating the parts of projects that the donor was reluctant to fund from other funds. *Portraying* consisted of deliberate tactics that were used to manipulate donors' perceptions. These included window-dressing that gave the impression that the organization was conforming to donor conditions while continuing with core tasks as usual. Withholding information was used when the actual information on, for example, activities and outcomes could harm the organization's appearance for the donors. The SNGO could also intentionally give the donors inaccurate information by, among other things, misrepresenting overhead costs or self-financing requirements.

The most active and outward-oriented managerial strategies are defiance and manipulation (Oliver 1991). *Defiance* means outright resistance to conformity and being public about it. *Manipulation* refers to an effort to influence the context (Oliver 1991, 157) by, for example, going public in the media to convey the message and the goals of the organization or by looking for powerful allies. Suchman (1995, 587) refers to manipulation in the case that an organization can change its environment through the creation of new beliefs or audiences.

In line with Oliver (1991), Elbers and Arts (2011) consider strategic responses on behalf of the SNGOs to be conscious and active. However, I would claim that it is important to consider the context as well as the agency of local actors. Ghanaian and Indian NGOs have a long history with donors, and they have developed a certain amount of self-esteem in their dealings with the donors. As Bawole and Hossain (2015, 2063) note in their study on NGOs' relations with the local government in Ghana, the country enjoys decades of multi-party democracy combined with decentralization processes and a vibrant NGO community. But even in Ghana there is suspicion and mistrust between NGOs and the local government that result in tokenistic or cautious partnerships (Bawole & Hossain 2015, 2079). In a post-conflict country like Liberia where the resources are extremely scarce, local NGOs do not have much leverage. I also doubt whether their responses would be active and conscious in a situation where survival on both the individual and on the organizational level is a pressing need. The findings concerning Western business management indicate that even business strategies emerge informally within organizations instead of being consciously determined (Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998). Therefore, it is not likely that managerial strategies to cope with legitimation would be conscious efforts either.

The above discussions have shown that an organization can revert to different kinds of managerial actions and strategies to cope with the pressure for legitimacy, and that it needs to alter and modify its actions at different times (Greenwood et al. 2011, 351). In the analysis of my data, I will look for traces of managerial strategies that would indicate *Conforming, Influencing,* and *Striving for independence*, but I will also look for novel forms of engaging with legitimacy pressures as a data-driven exercise.

2.4 Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, the main concepts of organizational field, legitimacy, legitimacy audiences, and the management of multiple legitimacy audiences as well as their use in this particular study were discussed. In this study, development cooperation is understood as an organizational field that consists of all the organizations that engage in the development effort and are joined with each other through a relational system within which they interact intensively with each other. This organizational field has its own norms, values, and practices that are considered legitimate. These templates spread because of the tendency towards isomorphism within the field. Isomorphism works through coercive, mimetic, and normative forces, and as a result, organizations become similar to each other (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Scott 2001).

Legitimacy in this dissertation is considered to be the perception other actors within the field have of an organization. This perception is based on societal beliefs, norms, and values that determine whether an organization can be considered an appropriate and proper member of the particular organizational field (Deephouse & Suchman 2008, 54).

The actors that assess the legitimacy of an organization are called legitimacy audiences (Suchman 1995), and they use their perceptions and expectations in their assessment. This assessment may be based on different criteria that relate to different forms of legitimacy, that is, regulative, pragmatic, normative, and cultural–cognitive considerations.

All organizations engage with multiple legitimacy audiences, so we need to understand the diverse dynamics that are caused by the interaction with multiple legitimacy demands from multiple legitimacy audiences. As noted above, the identification of the significant legitimacy audiences is an empirical question that can be examined from the point of view of any organization by focusing on what kind of audiences it interacts with and how it builds legitimacy in these interactions. With the diversity of backgrounds of the audiences comes the possibility of them having differing institutional logics that underpin their legitimacy demands and the criteria they use when making their legitimacy judgments. Organizational responses in a situation where there are multiple logics present will be determined by the power that each legitimacy audience possesses in relation to the organization. (Pache & Santos 2010.)

The multiple legitimacy audiences have their own backgrounds and expectations, or legitimacy demands, towards an organization and therefore the organization needs to engage in several management strategies and activities to enhance its legitimacy. In addition to the pressures from the donors and the requirements that they transmit from the field of development cooperation, an SNGO needs to consider the local legitimacy audiences as well. The institutional logics of the local stakeholders and therefore also of their legitimacy demands may differ or even contradict those of the donors and require a different set of managerial actions.

Chapter 4 will explore the local context and history of Liberia and the case NGO. Then the specific conditions of the local context and how they affect the legitimacy relationships and legitimacy pressures are taken forward to contribute to the understanding of the main local legitimacy audiences, the MoE, and local communities, in chapters 5 and 7 respectively.

Before embarking on a journey to Liberia, I will discuss the methodological choices I have made and introduce the case study and the research process in more detail in the chapter that follows.

3 METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I present the methodological choices I made to answer the research questions. I discuss the methodological aspects of studying NGOs in development and the main influences of this study. I used a case study as my research strategy and as a consequence I have been working closely with a Liberian NGO. I briefly outline how I got access to the organization and then I describe my research process and the methods and choices made in the collection and analysis of the data. Finally, I present some ethical considerations and reflect on my research process from cultural, social, and political as well as emotional and subjective perspectives.

3.1 Approaches to studying development NGOs

Research on NGOs and international development has revolved around the questions of the nature of NGOs and their emergence and development, the work that they do and its impacts, and their role in the reproduction of the cultural dynamics of the aid system and their relationships with other actors (Brass et al. 2018). The amount of literature on development NGOs has increased since the late 1980s and 1990s alongside the growing enthusiasm that NGOs and the civil society were receiving from the donors looking for an alternative to state-led development (Lewis 2007; Howell et al. 2008).

A number of problems have been attached to the study of development NGOs. These include, for instance, normativity and positionality of the researchers, and their respective idealism towards the role of NGOs in development, as many writers tend to attach idealism to the possibilities of NGOs to make a difference in development (Lewis 2007, 370). This may be attributed to characteristics that are attached to NGOs without deeper analysis, such as them being cost-effective, agile, and close to the grassroots level. The criticism concerning positionality emerges from the fact that quite a few NGO researchers have been non-academic authors who work for NGOs themselves (Lewis 2007, 372). Although this gives them an insider view (Lewis 2007, 371), it may also cause bias, especially for large, professionalized development NGOs that are cautious about their reputation (Brass et al. 2018).

The criticism towards the applied nature and lack of theory building in NGO research was, according to Lewis (2007, 373), more accurate in the early days, since much of the research was conducted as consultancies and paid for by donors. With the diffusion of the donor interest in NGOs and civil society, the research has been geared towards more theoretical work on, for example, local level politics (Hilhorst 2003), or power in partnerships (Lister 2000; Ebrahim 2003). For example, Girei (2016), who worked as an advisor for the Ugandan NGOs that she studied, engaged in an analysis of hegemony showing that practice and critical analysis do not rule each other out.

The above-mentioned questions on positionality and normativity were also central for me as I entered academia as an NGO practitioner, and I discuss these issues more broadly towards the end of this chapter.

In my study, the starting point is an SNGO's position within the international field of development cooperation and especially the demands on the legitimacy that the NGO faces in its relations to different legitimacy audiences simultaneously. However, as is typical for qualitative research, my methodological approaches have slightly changed during the research process, and can be seen as a combination of methods and techniques that have generated research material on NGO relationships.

In my research, I have been inspired by multiple fields and used a combination of methods previously applied in studying either development NGOs or legitimacy relationships in any organization. My main research strategies (Denzin & Lincoln 2011, 12) draw from ethnography, action research, and case study research that are combined to enrich the perspectives of organizational institutionalism in a developing country context. In what follows, I will discuss each of these in turn and how they have contributed to the design of my methodological approach.

3.1.1 From ethnography to aidnography

Ethnography developed some 100 years ago as the main method in anthropology, a long-term approach to fieldwork in non-Western cultures to study the structures, symbols, lives and experiences of "other" people. Central to ethnography is the use of observation as a source of information. A researcher may engage in participant observation by staying with people and taking part in their everyday activities. Constant reflection and journaling help the researcher to balance involvement and scientific detachment. (Gobo 2011.)

Ethnographic approaches to study development cooperation and its practices (for example Mosse 2005; Lewis & Mosse 2006; Igoe & Kelsall 2005) have sometimes been called aidnography (Gould 2004). In addition to the geographic location, the field of development cooperation itself forms the "field" of ethnographic study and development can be seen as a form of practice to be studied (Mosse 2013). Gould (2004, 6) identifies two strands in the ethnographies of aid: (a) textual analysis on the rhetoric of aid, and (b) engagements with actors. Many of these studies focus on discourses that reproduce power relationships or reveal how actors use their agency within the aid system (Rossi 2004). Examples of aidnography in NGOs include, for example, Hilhorst (2003), who followed the life of an NGO in the Philippines, and Bornstein's (2005) study on religious NGOs in Zimbabwe.

With the ever-shortening time frame of research, the long-term immersion of ethnographers is changing into short, intense, and focused visits to the site where observations and discussions take place (Kontinen & Oinas 2015, 185). These may include observing workshops, field visits, and other events.

An extended stay in Liberia was not possible for me, so I made three separate visits of about five weeks each. My data collection methods consisted partly of taking part in NAEAL's activities, spending time with its staff members, and observing the practices and interactions. In line with ethnographic thinking, I also dedicated daily time for journaling (Emerson 2011), making notes in my field diary and reflecting on what I had seen and learned but also on my positionality.

3.1.2 Action research

Action research covers approaches and strategies that include democratic collaboration between the researcher and the local stakeholders. In an ideal situation, the research questions are chosen together with the participants, who are co-researchers during the whole process. Learning and reflection enrich both the researcher and the participants, and the results of the investigation should lead to actionable learning. (Greenwood & Levin 2007, 1.)

Popplewell and Hayman (2012) have studied the application of action research by international NGOs, and they concluded that although action research seems to be popular, little analytical work has been done and criticism of its quality and rigour persists. INGOs use action research mainly for organizational development as well as monitoring and evaluation. Action research is considered to have the potential to increase downward accountability and increase the ownership of an evaluation as they enhance learning within the organization during the evaluation process. However, ensuring participation, especially in the initial phases of the formulation of the evaluative questions is usually challenging within the set-up of development cooperation (Popplewell & Hayman 2012).

During my research, I organized workshops that were meant to enhance the case NGO's evaluation capacity. My motivation for a formative intervention came from the idea that the staff would benefit directly from the engagement with my research. I pictured myself as a "critical friend" that would guide a process of learning and critical reflection in Liberia, as described by David M. Fetterman (2001, 123–124). Fetterman is known for participatory evaluation and among those scholars that see evaluation from a developmental perspective (Patton 2011). In participatory evaluation, the stakeholders and clients take part in the evaluation process, and therefore the power derives from the group of stakeholders, not from the evaluator.

Another method that I used in workshops and interviews was Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which emerged in the late 1980s. It is a methodology that follows a group process and maintains an appreciative and positive attitude towards the people and their work. It uses collaborative and participatory exercises that concentrate on the existing strengths and resources available in the organization and develops the best of "what is" in the organization for a better future. (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005.)

AI is based on social constructivism and emphasizes different perspectives, relationships, and patterns of interaction. It is believed that "words create worlds", meaning that the way we phrase our questions, how we talk and act makes a difference. Asking positive questions starts to move the system to a more positive future and new understandings are created when people listen actively to each other. The stories that people tell, for example, about their best experiences at work contain the mechanisms that are needed for continued success for a better future for the organization. AI is criticized for sweeping problems under the carpet, but AI's stance is that problem analysis leads to blaming and resistance. Proponents of AI see problems as frustrated dreams and resistance indicates a deeper desire within the organization. (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005; Preskill & Catsambas 2006.)

3.1.3 Case study

Qualitative methods and especially qualitative case studies have been very popular in studying NGOs and development (Brass et al. 2018). They provide a thick description of particular places, projects, organizations, and geographical locations. The case study allows various disciplines and theoretical approaches to be combined in the analysis, which is also typical to development studies. For example, Ebrahim (2003) studied the relationships, tensions, and strategies of two Indian NGOs and their funders. He used mainly in-depth interviews to collect his material but employed concepts from both Foucault and Bourdieu.

Cases can shed light on phenomena that span from the local to the national and international levels. This is especially important for my study, which looks at the dynamics between the international field of development cooperation and the local context. Fejerskov's study (2018a) of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation is also a good example of multi-sited fieldwork that spanned from Seattle to New Delhi to a project location in Odisha and analysed the sense-making and translation of meanings between the different levels in the aid chain.

I had the opportunity to visit Liberia and NAEAL on three different occasions in spring 2012, autumn 2012, and autumn 2013, which provided me the possibility to see the case at different points in time. The extended time frame of my study allowed for revising my research questions and focus as I gained more insight into my case and object of study. Although it was only a matter of two years, many things changed, from leadership and donor policies to the local context. Unexpected events, such as the passing away of key informants and collaborators, changed the course of my study.

Case studies convey ideas on best practices, critique social conditions, and advance theories, but they continue to be critiqued for lack of rigour and the possibility to generalize and build theories based on generalizations (Brass et al. 2018). The rigour of a case study can be enhanced by triangulation using various data sets, methods, and theories, or by having more than one researcher working on the same case (Yin 2014). In my study, I have used data that comes from different sources and that has been gathered with different methods. I have both interview and observational material, as well as material produced in workshops, and documentation. The contemporary diagnosis, that is, a reflection by someone who experienced the events first-hand (Laine et al. 2007), was gained through the interviews and workshops with staff members that had different periods of engagement with the organization. I ended up going through the material with different theoretical lenses as well. First, from an accountability perspective and then from a legitimacy perspective. This process is explained in more detail in sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.3.

A case study can be flawed, with subjective bias if researchers let their preconceived notions affect the analysis (Flyvberg 2006, 223). For me, this was a danger because of my background in development practice. However, a practitioner's background and personal characteristics can also be strengths (Flyvberg 2006, 223). An understanding of the context of international development cooperation provided me with a grasp of the issues I was studying and helped in asking good questions. Being a good listener was a personal trait that made the interview sessions more enjoyable for my informants and me.

3.1.4 Organizational institutionalism in the research of development NGOs

Organizational institutionalism is an emerging field in the research on NGOs and development. Case studies have been the preferred approach in these studies. Fejerskov (2015; 2016) has studied how the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has become a part of the organizational field of development cooperation and Claeyé and Jackson (2012) how institutional isomorphism is shaping management practices in South African NGOs.

Interviews seem to be the most common way to collect material, but field visits including participant observation and document review are also mentioned. For example, Battilana and Dorado (2010) studied two microcredit NGOs during three trips to Bolivia and made 78 interviews, visited local offices, and accompanied loan officers on lending trips. Fejerskov (2015; 2018) engaged in fieldwork inside and outside of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, interviewed staff from different levels of the organization, including long-term employees that could provide the history of the organization, and visited offices and projects in India. Ramanath (2009) studied three Indian NGOs and conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews and impromptu group interviews accompanied by participant observation and archival research of both the NGO and government records. Claeyé and Jackson (2012) and Elbers and

Arts (2011) studied multiple NGOs in South Africa, and Ghana and India respectively, through semi-structured interviews with NGO leaders.

Influences from ethnography can be observed in the longer-term engagement in organizations and the use of participant observation and detailed notetaking during the field study periods. Olivier de Sardan (2013) sees that the dialogue between anthropology and the sociology of institutions is fruitful, as they share an empirical commitment and an interest in norms and the analysis of power as well as a historical perspective. For me, the historical dimension that I gained through interviewing long-time staff and board members and the literature I found from the 1980s gave a much deeper understanding of the importance of historicity in case studies.

3.1.5 Methodological choices and overall paradigm of this study

My study forms part of the emerging field of NGO research within organizational institutionalism. In my methodology, I have combined elements from ethnography and action research to a case study approach.

I am interested in an SNGO's position between the international field of development cooperation and local context and especially in the demands on legitimacy that the NGO faces in its relations to different stakeholders and how the NGO manages the tensions that emerge between the differing demands.

I opted for a case study of a Liberian NGO that receives development cooperation funding and engages in implementing projects that are organized according to the scripts that are typical for the field, the NGO uses the practices and language that are typical for a development NGO (Tvedt 2002; 2006). A single organization should be sufficient because I am interested in its relations with various stakeholders, which will broaden the perspective. Such a study had not been done in Liberia or in a post-conflict situation, so there was a possibility to provide new insights in a new context.

From ethnography, I adopted participant observation of the activities of the organization and interaction with the staff members during their daily work in the communities. My engagement in interventions that had the aim of enhancing the NGO's evaluation capacity introduced elements of action research. I framed the workshops, and many of my interviews, with AI to help the participants to see the existing strengths in their work.

This study is positioned within the constructivist paradigm, which holds that multiple realities exist and that they are constructed by humans in social interaction (Denzin & Lincoln 2011, 13). Knowledge creation is understood to be a shared process between the researcher and the participants that will enable a search for understanding and interpretation of the phenomenon at hand (Deetz 2011, 33). Both AI (Cooperrider & Whitney 2005) and organizational institutionalism (Scott 2008, 16) embrace constructivism and share the idea of multiple socially constructed realities that depend, for example, on language, culture, social status, prior life experiences, and time and place. According to Lincoln et al. (2011, 108), the quality of constructivist research is assessed based on its trustworthiness and authenticity as well as on its possibilities to catalyse action.

3.2 Introduction to the case organization NAEAL

From 2009 to 2010 I worked on a project called "Towards evaluation for everyday use" (Kontinen 2011) as an advisor on monitoring and evaluation. This was a time when various Finnish NGOs were designing their M&E systems with both learning and accountability in mind. The role of the Southern partner organizations started to puzzle me more and more as the new systems required a lot of work from them. The Finnish Refugee Council was one of the NGOs that took their partners' interests to heart. They were willing to collaborate with me on a research project and introduced me to NAEAL in Liberia.

National Adult Education Association of Liberia (NAEAL) is dedicated to promoting functional literacy in Liberia. NAEAL originated as a teacher organization that had the idea of "each one teach one to read" in the 1970s, so it has been embedded in Liberian society and its history for some time. NAEAL uses adult literacy as its strategy to sustain community development that will lead to social transformation. According to the organization's vision, this will lead to "a Liberia free of illiteracy with people having a strong identity, and self-confidence to participate in the nation's development process" (NAEAL 2010).

As an organization, NAEAL strives for independence by being non-partisan while at the same time involving stakeholders to increase ownership and sustainability of its actions. High ethical standards in service provision as well as in resource management are emphasized in the strategy paper, together with the accessibility to the population it serves by being flexible and by limiting its bureaucracy. (NAEAL 2010.)

The NGO assumes various roles as it provides services, engages in advocacy work for adult literacy and education, and brokers between donors and local communities.

NAEAL is highly dependent on the resources that it receives through development cooperation from different types of international and local donors. While it is involved in the implementation of donor projects, it needs to take into account the multitude of requirements for project management and current ideas of development. The influence of the development discourse can be seen in the core principles that are presented in the organization's strategy that range from a gender-based approach to the promotion of human rights and includes terms like participation, accountability, and sustainability. The field of development cooperation is therefore a major determining factor in its work.

As a national NGO, the main bulk of NAEAL's work takes place within the local context. The government's leadership within the education sector is acknowledged in the strategy paper and the government's role is seen as an integral part of the sustainability of the efforts that various actors make in enhancing adult literacy in the country. The promotion of the importance of adult literacy forms an important part of NAEAL's work and it is targeted both at the government and the public.

The work in the communities is organized through literacy circles. These circles have some twenty participants that are facilitated by a literate volunteer who has been trained by NAEAL for the task. Manuals for both learners and facilitators are provided for the literacy circles. A typical literacy programme would run for nine months during which some basic skills in literacy and numeracy can be acquired. In the course of the nine-month programme health and community participation will be dealt with. The study circles are run in a participatory way to encourage the involvement of the learners and to help them gain more self-confidence to speak publicly and engage more widely in the community issues.

Unlike at the beginning of its history, at the beginning of the 2010s, NAEAL had no chapters or members. A board of directors and salaried staff members ran it. There was a limited number of administrative staff accompanied by staff members that were employed on contracts that depended on the length of the donor projects they worked with.

In 2012–13 NAEAL was working from a rented office space but had the intention to build its own premises to gain more sustainability for its work. The office itself was quite spacious, with separate offices for the administrative staff and larger office space for the project personnel. The office building was located outside of Monrovia, but also far away from the various locations where the study circles were organized. Transportation was a major limiting factor for NAEAL's outreach. A small fleet of vehicles that had been inherited from previous donor projects was stored on the premises. Some field staff had been provided with motorbikes by their respective donor projects.

NAEAL serves as a case of a Southern development NGO within the organizational field of development cooperation because it receives most of its financing through the development cooperation channel, engages in project work that is typical of development cooperation, follows the scripts of the field, and uses the language of this particular field (see also Kontinen et al. 2015). In the beginning, NAEAL seemed like an exceptionally good NGO with a long history and a clear strategy, visionary leadership, and the urge to become a learning organization. With time, it turned out to be a typical case (Laine et al. 2007, 33) of an SNGO struggling with survival in difficult circumstances but also with its own strengths and successes.

3.3 The process of data collection

A case study allows for various kinds of methods to be used for data collection. In my study, these were interviews, participant observation, document review, and a series of participatory capacity development interventions. Qualitative research is frequently presented as a step-by-step process that starts with general research questions and research design, moves on to collection of data and its analysis and ends with reporting the findings. Occasionally there may be an arrow that indicates an additional round of data collection. My study, and studies of many others, has been a messier, back-and-forth process with pleasant surprises and dead ends. I will walk the reader through this process as honestly as possible in this chapter on data collection and the following one on the analysis of the research material.

In this sub-chapter, I narrate the process of data collection in chronological order, starting from getting access to the field and through the three field trips that I made to Liberia during 2012 and 2013. Finally, I will present an overview of the research material that I collected.

3.3.1 The first visit to the field: entering an unknown terrain

My "access to the field" (Huttunen 2010, 57) was facilitated through my connection to the Finnish Refugee Council (FRC), one of NAEAL's partner organizations. I had been engaged in an evaluation capacity-building process with ten Finnish NGOs called "Towards evaluation for everyday use" (Kontinen 2011) and FRC was one of these NGOs. I also facilitated trainings on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in my capacity as the programme adviser on monitoring and evaluation for a Finnish umbrella organization for development NGOs, Kepa. What frustrated me in these activities was the Finnish NGO participants' eagerness to follow the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland requirements on M&E. It seemed that accountability upwards towards the back donor compromised the Finnish NGOs' consideration for their partners in the South. During the process, however, one of the transformative mechanisms that were identified was the opportunity to engage the Southern partners in the process and giving space for their voice. This inspired me to follow the voices from the South, so I turned my interest to the role of the Southern partner in the aid chain and to see what the Northern M&E requirements meant for them.

I had met only briefly with the FRC resident representative who had arranged for me to stay in the FRC guest house and had promised me logistical support. I arrived in Liberia with mixed feelings but looking forward to being "in the field" again. At the airport, I was met with Sam, the driver, and with Liberian English. Sam was the one that I spent most of my time with because he drove me from place to place. Our conversations were "small, small" because we were not speaking the same English.

The relationship with the FRC resident representative was not very warm in the beginning. He was suspicious of me being a researcher "PhD .. you know nothing about anything" [2] (Field diary 26 February 2012). Obviously, the academic world was not appealing to him. Some weeks later, as he got to know me also as a development practitioner and as a person, I was promoted to the category of "my sister in the silent revolution". During the three field trips, I stayed in the FRC guest house that was annexed to the resident representative's flat. This allowed me to be part of his family and other social groups.

[2] "PhD .. sää mistään mitään tiärä"

FRC's resident representative and NAEAL's executive director were my main gatekeepers in the beginning. It is customary in Liberia that people higher up in the organization set up meetings and introduce you to other people. My meetings with NAEAL staff, board members, and the MoE were first set up by NAEAL's executive director, and the FRC resident representative assisted in my connections to local NGOs and some of the donor offices.

I was nervous before going to Liberia. West Africa was new to me, and I knew very little of Liberia. Now, after a month's stay at the Nordic Africa Institute in November 2015 and an intensive study of the history of Liberia, I know more, but I went there ignorant of most of the atrocities in the country's history. This meant I was able to engage with people as individuals and not think too much of their past.

On my second day in Liberia, one of the project coordinators was heading to the field to monitor the construction of pit latrines in the communities. That would be an excellent opportunity for me to see some action on the ground. I was placed in the back seat of the pick-up truck and off we went. I had no time to go to the toilet, eat or put any sun lotion on my pale skin. I learned the hard way to always carry water and crackers in my back bag. The community was less than a kilometre off the main road. There were houses built with cement fairly close together. Small stalls with peppers and other small items for sale were placed in front of some of these houses.

The expectation of the NAEAL and FRC people as well as of the local CBOs seemed to be that I could be dropped in the middle of a village and then I would start asking everybody about their experiences with the literacy circles. The project coordinator gathered women to meet the Researcher and went off to see how the pit latrines were doing. I was seated on a white plastic chair. Women and children started to gather around me, children staring and giggling. Some women came with their "ABC books" in hand and tried to show them to me. It seemed that they expected me to have a look at the books, maybe go through some pages to see if the exercises were correctly done. Nobody spoke English. I am a shy person and felt uncomfortable. I noticed the peppers in the stall and some women with their hands wrapped in cloth. I tried to smile at the children that kept gathering around me. Finally, a teenage boy that spoke some English appeared. I found out that the women were making soap and the cloth wrapped around their hands was protecting them from burning their hands with the lye mixture. The women had between five to six children. I told them that I had two daughters to show that we had at least something in common. According to the schoolboy that translated all the children went to the school that was situated in the middle of the village. The school also had the only functioning well, although more had initially been built for the village by World Vision. Then a tall, slim lady with extraordinarily beautiful eyes approached. In the middle of the grey village and otherwise shy people, the lady looked like a queen, very dignified. She spoke beautiful English. A sensation of familiarity and mixed feelings of intrusion and awkwardness went through my mind as we continued talking about things in their village.

The next morning, I arrived at the NAEAL office and was escorted to a small room with a desk in the middle of the room and a metal chair in front of it. The executive director was a big man with a large belly. I handed him the boxes of Finnish chocolate that I had brought as a present. Nowadays, I know that chocolate is not commonly eaten in Liberia. We were both nervous. I tried to be as polite as possible. I explained that my intention was to learn, not to assess and I was interested in the perceptions and practices of different actors on monitoring and evaluation and the accountability relationships between different organizations. I intended to participate in events and merely to observe what was going on. My wish was also to interview civil society and NGO sector representatives, the MoE, NAEAL's donors and the Executive Director himself, and any others that he considered important.

The Executive Director had read the report on the "Towards evaluation for everyday use" process and he was interested in hearing how the process had been done and if I could support them in implementing a similar process. He also told me that the full support of the board had been secured for my research and the MoE and NAEAL partners had been informed of my visit. (Field diary 21 February 2012)

Again, without prior warning, I was told that I had the opportunity to go and observe and ask questions from a group of facilitators that were having a refresher training in a place called Low-cost village. I took a sigh of breath and started to prepare questions. AI seemed like the best approach. I would just ask them for their best moment as a facilitator and their dreams for the future. We encountered a small hut with one woman and eleven men from nine communities that were facilitated by two NAEAL staff members. These facilitators had been working with their groups for six months and were now having more training on how to conduct the literacy circles. Each of them gave a short presentation and were then asked to reflect on their presentation. Then others gave them feedback and suggestions on how to improve. The spirit was positive, and an effort was made not to embarrass anyone. I was struggling with understanding Liberian English. When my turn came, Henry translated my questions and their answers from English to Liberian English and vice versa.

After the first surprise visits, I got used to seizing the opportunities that presented themselves and just went along – with crackers and bottles of water always with me. After a while, I had visited several communities and the same pattern started to emerge. Upon our arrival, the women from the literacy circles were gathered hastily to the community centre and they came with their books, looking nervously at me. The most interesting visits were the ones when the literacy circle was going on and I could see the difference that the facilitator's personality made. Some groups had fun. Others were steered by young men that wanted to show off their abilities. Same practices were used in all the groups for maintaining the interest of the participants, saying hello-hi, asking people to stand up and answer, doing group exercises, and telling stories. There were also differences in the spirits of different communities. In some, all the ladies wore their best *lapas* for the visit. In others, it was obvious even for an outsider that people were still rather traumatized. Men, especially the village chiefs or Literacy Management Committee chairs, very often started by telling me about the difficulties encountered by the community and by asking for a donation for a well or an extension for the literacy circle. Here my recourse was again to AI, as I turned the discussion to the strengths that the community had, and they happily went on talking about the things they had accomplished as a community.

I travelled in the FRC pick-up truck. We would pick up people and goods on the way. The staff members explained that that was a way to maintain good relations with the people. I understood this, but at the same time, the administrator in me said that project cars should not be used to transport outsiders as it constitutes a major insurance risk. The car rides were tough. We would travel five to nine hours a day and my back was hurting.

Some days I would stay in Monrovia to interview donors, local NGO representatives, and the MoE staff. The NAEAL administrator accompanied me on these visits. This was good because I did not know the city nor the offices of all these different organizations. However, he would enter the office room with me. The two first interviews were clearly affected by his presence as people started apologizing for their views or started discussing open matters with him. I had to ask him to wait for me in another room for the consecutive interviews. He was seemingly displeased with this, and I tried to soothe him by conducting several short interviews with him on the history of NAEAL. In retrospect, these interviews turned out to be part of the best material that I collected because he truly was the memory of the organization. He passed away a couple of months after my visit, which makes the material even more valuable.

For the interviews, I drafted interview guides for different groups, donors, local NGOs, the MoE personnel, and community leaders and the literacy committees. As I only had a short time available, my first visit lasted for five weeks, I focused the interviews on a few specific themes. This approach has been described also by Kontinen and Oinas (2015). After introducing myself and my assignment I would discuss mainly accountability relationships, monitoring practices, and the respondent’s relationship with NAEAL. The method was very close to a consultant’s way of doing quick and dirty data collection, although I did have a bit more time available than an evaluation consultant. Fortunately, I could come back and revise the scope of my interviews and fill in the gaps during my later visits (Scheyvens & Storey 2003, 18).

The short time frame was good however because I was unable to engage in any longer organizational development interventions that would have taken me even further away from being a researcher into being a practitioner. I did engage in workshopping during my first visit to Liberia. Organizing workshops is a common approach in development cooperation. For donors, workshops represent a possibility to reach a large number of people with a message that is deemed relevant. For local citizens, they present an opportunity to strengthen relationships and receive material and other benefits. (Smith 2003; Watkins & Swidler 2013.)

My first workshop in Liberia was well planned with a detailed facilitators' plan in place. My co-facilitator was Henry from FRC. He was relieved when he noticed that I used participatory methods that were familiar to him as well. Henry became my cultural guide that translated not only Liberian English but also cultural aspects that were new and unfamiliar to me.

During the three-day workshop on monitoring and evaluation, I reported the information that I had gathered from the staff, communities, donors, and other stakeholders so far. I had used the AI technique and was able to present all the strengths that had come up from the interviews. The immediate reaction was silence. I was astonished and tried to enliven the situation up by exclaiming how wonderful the results were. The feedback session of the workshop then showed that the strength-based stance had been useful and that positive aspects that different stakeholders had expressed had made the staff feel proud of their organization and the work they did. The workshop served as a validation of my data at the same time.

As a result of the workshop, the participants came up with four projects that they agreed to implement by the end of 2012. The projects ranged from increasing the staff's knowledge on the organization's existing policies and guidelines, especially in financial management, to internal and external information sharing. The monitoring and evaluation initiative was the strengthening of the capacity to analyse monitoring data that was being collected. As became clear in the future, these projects were de-prioritized and not realized.

Being involved as a facilitator makes it difficult to follow up and observe what is happening in the group. The active role can also make people act differently. As for the M&E workshop, I ended up legitimating and strengthening the influence of the organizational field of development cooperation in NAEAL's organizational life. (See also Kontinen & Onali 2017.)

The executive director presented his idea for a participatory M&E system for NAEAL before my departure from Liberia. He seemed to be very motivated to move forward with a developmental process within the organization and asked me to collaborate on it.

3.3.2 The second visit to the field: emerged in evaluation

The executive director of NAEAL passed away in October 2012. I had already bought the flights for my second field trip. Now my biggest support, the executive director, would no longer be there when I returned in November 2012. I was wondering whether I should change my research plan. The idea for a developmental process around NAEAL's organizational development would have to be given up, because there was no management support for such a process. The new executive director had her hands full with day-to-day matters and the four projects that had been identified in the workshop we had conducted in spring 2012 had been deprioritized. They had made a plan and held meetings, but there had been no time to advance them, the staff explained to me.

What was important for me was that I could no longer control the situation. As I let go of control, the process started to evolve and to carry me and my research. FRC decided to have their work and relationships with NAEAL evaluated and with that opened a new window of opportunity to engage with the evaluation process. During my autumn 2012 visit, we organized three half-day workshops on planning the evaluation, obtaining local views on what the evaluation questions should be, who should be involved, and what the terms of reference should look like. Luckily for my research, this was related to evaluation capacity development, and, at the same time, I could make myself useful for NAEAL and FRC. I was still very much struggling with my practitioner identity and the normativity that comes with it. I wanted so much to be of use for the organizations that invested their time in my research and me. I suppose I was also still looking for an ideal model for learning and developing evaluation capacities, such as the one presented by Preskill and Boyle (2008).

We talked about the experiences the staff members had had with evaluation. Their best memories and experiences were the ones from a process in Sierra Leone where the Liberians had been able to take part in a REFLECT-type of evaluation. The same participatory methods used in the REFLECT literacy circles had also been used in the evaluation. The evaluation team had consisted of learners, facilitators, and outsiders – such as the NAEAL and FRC staff members and local MoE people. The team had been divided into small groups that stayed overnight in the communities and had a chance to interact with the people during their visit. An opposite experience was shared by staff members that had been engaged as interviewers in large donor evaluations. They had entered communities with multipage interview guides in complicated English and most of the time had been spent in translating and making the questions understandable for the interviewees.

To ensure that the evaluation questions would be useful and relevant for all the stakeholders, we mapped the stakeholders and thought of ways to include them in the process. Different ministries were identified as important stakeholders (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Gender and Development, Ministry of Youth and Culture). In addition to NAEAL and FRC, various community-based organizations had been implementing organizations within the programme.

The FRC Helsinki office was a stakeholder in the evaluation, and perhaps the most influential one. The Helsinki office would give the frames for the evaluation as to the time period and the issues to be investigated. They insisted on having the agricultural and sanitation components' relevance and impacts within the scope of the evaluation to see if there was anything left in the communities on these original aspects of the FRC programme. They emphasized the importance of having as many people's thoughts as possible recorded and finding out about impacts on the individual, family, and community levels. The FRC Monrovia office was more interested in the assessment of the adult literacy component. They wished to see what the capacity of NAEAL was in implementing the literacy programme as such and whether the study material was useful, applicable and what the learners had learned within the programme. It was decided that the staff would find a way to design a tool to assess different levels of literacy and numeracy skills in the communities. There was a general problem that the MoE had not been able to develop a test that could have been used in the whole country to assess literacy skills and provide certificates to those that passed the test.

The FRC Helsinki office wished to involve the communities in the making of the terms of reference. What seemed like a daunting exercise turned out to be an enlightening process. It was decided that the communities would be engaged in the process and that they would formulate their own evaluation questions – four communities were visited in Bomi and Cape Mount provinces and 22 interviews took place. In each community, a learner, a facilitator, a Literacy Management Committee member, and someone that was not part of the literacy project were interviewed. The interviews were conducted by NAEAL and FRC personnel. At first, it was difficult for the community members to think of questions because they were used to answering questions not asking them. They ultimately came up with questions that really challenged authorities, like the Literacy Management Committee, NAEAL, FRC, and the MoE, especially when it came to securing the sustainability and continuation of the activities in the communities. They were also critical of facilitators and learners and wanted to know if they had performed well. I observed the interviews in Robertsport and once again realized that I was an outsider and had difficulties to follow up on what was being said, but it was a privilege to see a fishing community in their daily practices. The following day I helped the interviewers gather the information from the handwritten templates into an Excel sheet. Back in Monrovia we (NAEAL and FRC staff and myself) grouped the questions thematically and forwarded them to FRC headquarters to be included in the final terms of reference of the evaluation.

3.3.3 The third visit: letting go

A year later in November 2013, I visited Liberia for a third time. Coming back was now easy. Because I had kept coming back, I was now seen as a well-known acquaintance and certainly a friend of Liberia.

I attended a staff Monday meeting and saw that significant activity was going on in NAEAL. There were five active projects by FRC, ARD, EPAG, ZOA, and UNWOMEN, and there were prospects of signing a new contract or an extension with ZOA, UNESCO, SMWF, and FRC. The World Bank project had been able to secure more funds from the Swedish government for a year and NAEAL was working with a thousand girls in Margibi, Grand Bassa, and Montserrado counties. The ZOA project would end in six months. At the end of 2013, Liberia was no longer considered a country under reconstruction and the Dutch were phasing out. NAEAL continued with the Sirleaf Market Women Foundation with various literacy groups. The American forestry programme continued in three counties and UNESCO had hired them for nine months in two counties. The UNWOMEN project, on the other hand, was ending in November. They had been able to hire more field staff for IRC programmes and a German curriculum expert was coming for four years with the idea of drafting a second phase for the literacy programme.

NAEAL was engaged in many training programmes on project management, proposal writing, financial management, and advocacy training, as NARDA was now involved with NAEAL's capacity building. NARDA was one of the Liberian NGOs that had been chosen by the American programme IREX to train local NGOs in leadership and organizational development. For NARDA, NAEAL was a good organization to work with because they came to meetings and were open to sharing information as well as taking advice. They had a willingness to develop. (Interview 27 November 2013, NARDA)

Various donors gave NAEAL training on financial management. The internal requirements seemed to be getting stricter and the financial manager was taking a larger role during Monday meetings and in the matters of the organization. The executive director left the financial manager in charge when she left for a seminar in Sierra Leone, saying "give him the support you give to me".

This time I visited various projects financed by different donors and travelled more with NAEAL staff and their car. I offered to pay for my trips, but they laughed and said, "you are now part of the NAEAL family". The Dutch programme was already in phase two of the literacy programme. The literacy circle was brainstorming on how to prevent malaria in the community. They also used small storybooks to spark discussion. The story of a young girl that had left her village because she did not wish to marry the old chief fascinated the learners. This story also had an impact on the adolescent girls that studied business with the World Bank-sponsored EPAG programme. In Buchanan, Grand Bassa county, we visited various small centres with modest classrooms filled with girls that were there to learn how to run a small business of their own. They wished to have "no need to depend on men". The room next to the classrooms was filled with crawling babies. The girls were already mothers and the daycare facility allowed them to study. They paid full attention to the teacher, a stylish woman that talked enthusiastically. I was impressed by the skill she displayed in engaging with the group. (Field dairy 28 November 2013)

I had the opportunity to join the NAEAL staff's visit to the Bahn refugee camp in Nimba county. The camp had been there since January 2011, and it hosted Ivorians that had fled electoral violence in their country. There were still some 8000 Ivorian refugees at the camp and NAEAL had started providing literacy classes in French to some of the refugees. The car was full of people and filled with lively discussion in Liberian English that I could not follow. The road had potholes, the car first accelerated and then suddenly decelerated. I was holding back travel sickness for the whole ride and could not ask a single question that would have enhanced my research. However, I had some of the best discussions with the staff members once we arrived at the place where we stayed overnight.

The camp was a confined place, so it was easy to see differences between donor projects that operated within the camp. We visited a couple of educational projects. Some of them had nice buildings, stocks of books and equipment, and qualified teachers even for subjects such as German and Spanish. Then there were the NAEAL literacy circles, which were organized in an open hut and where the blackboard was made with spray paint on plywood on the spot. NAEAL staff went through the materials in the transparent box that was all the programme provided and explained repeatedly that there were no other perks included in the programme. The hut was full of people that wished to learn English and the situation seemed chaotic. The next day only the ones that wanted to learn to read and write from scratch and in French came and the learning started. (Field diary 1–3 December 2013)

Before my third visit, the FRC evaluation had been carried out and we could go into the results and recommendations. For the Liberians, the experience had been a good one. The evaluators had spent time in the communities, they had behaved with respect and had uncovered some new information. Namely, two networks were operating in Bomi county that had been organized by Literacy Management Committees and some literacy circles. They were using a revolving fund, called *zuzu* in Liberia, to keep the programme going without outside funding.

We sat down with NAEAL and FRC to think through the recommendations given in the evaluation and to decide what their stance was. FRC resident representative was disorientated because his idol Nelson Mandela had just died. The NAEAL executive director seemed to be exhausted, and Henry was ill. Two NAEAL staff members worked actively with me and we produced flipcharts with notes. It was decided that they would present the results of the evaluation to the rest of the staff and also during the second NAEAL partners' meeting. (Field diary 10 December 2013)

I was to learn what "we'll cross the river when we get there" meant. On the day of the presentation, all staff was present, and the two facilitators had no idea what they would do. They went to take photocopies of the evaluation report. Other staff members started to complain. The FRC resident representative gave a short ad-hoc presentation of the findings and then staff brainstormed in groups how to deliver the message of the evaluation to government representatives, Literacy Management Committee members and facilitators, and learners. The ideas on organizing meetings, sharing copies of the report, and doing drama to open discussion were all fine, but the content of the evaluation was not revealed. I was suffering inside but decided not to interfere. (Field diary 13 December 2013)

The meeting continued as a NAEAL partners' meeting. A representative of the MoE arrived, as did a person from Advancing Youth Program, a new USAID sponsored programme. No NAEAL donors came. The MoE representative requested a vehicle for the MoE and thought that jamborees and a football match might be a good way to disseminate the results of the evaluation. He continued that he could now understand better the method NAEAL was using and that it seemed to be effective and to have the possibility to enhance a movement towards literacy that could be managed by the communities themselves. (Field diary 13 December 2013)

As both the staff meeting and the partners' meeting were somewhat disappointing, I started to wonder if evaluation was not such a learning experience after all. Most probably, downwards accountability, that is, taking the results back to the communities that had provided the information for the evaluation, would not be realized either.

At the very end of my third trip to Liberia, a recreational day for the staff members of both FRC and NAEAL was organized. All the people that I had gotten to know introduced their family members to me with a lot of pride and I felt that I had gotten something right as it seemed very genuine, and it appeared that I had gained their confidence. At the staff recreational party that was at the same time my farewell party, people would say to me that we will see each other soon because they thought I would come back. I was in tears as I knew it was not that certain at all.

3.3.4 Overview of the research material collected

The M&E workshops turned out to be an important form of data collection. The mere entry to the organizations (NAEAL, FRC) was facilitated by the idea that my research would also give a boost to their respective organizational development. As an evaluation practitioner, I felt very strongly that evaluation should be utilization focused and this was the underlying principle in the small capacity-building intervention that became part of my research. In retrospect, the intervention was a good way to get to know the people, which made it easier to interact and interview people afterwards. The material that was produced with participatory methods in the workshops revealed more about M&E practices and people's dreams for the organization than what could have been uncovered in the interviews. However, the interviews with staff members were important for understanding personal life experiences, everyday practices, and relationships as well as how the M&E practices differed from project to project and from person to person within the organization.

I had the opportunity to attend various activities, literacy circles in the communities, Literacy Management Committee meetings, facilitator training, and monitoring visits to projects that were financed by different donors, NAEAL internal meetings and partners' meetings, local NGO fair, and so forth. Participant observation was one of the methods used by anthropologists, and it is among the preferred case study methods as well. As interaction with people is highly valued in Liberia, I was usually engaged in what was happening, was asked to give pep talks for the learners, and to take part in festivities. Therefore, being a mere observer was difficult.

In addition to the workshop, a series of interviews with the NAEAL board and staff members from different levels of the organization, donor representatives, and local stakeholders were made during the three visits. I made individual interview guides for the different stakeholder groups beforehand. I put down some key themes that I wanted to cover as a reminder for myself. The interviews usually lasted from half an hour to a bit more than one hour and flowed rather easily. During the first round of interviews, especially with staff and the communities, I used appreciative questions related to their best experiences within the organization and the community to break the ice and to make them feel more comfortable.

Donors included the staff of international organizations that had a presence in Liberia, both local offices of UN organizations, international NGOs both in donor capacity as well as in the capacity of implementers of aid projects. Local actors included the representatives of the MoE, local NGOs and CBOs, Literacy Management Committees, facilitators, learners, and other community members. A total of 53 interviews were conducted during the three field visits. (See Table 1.)

TABLE 1 Interviews

	Spring 2012	Autumn 2012	Autumn 2013	Total
NAEAL	11	1	1	13
DONORS	6	4	1	11
LOCAL ACTORS	7	22		29
TOTAL	24	27	2	53

When in Liberia I collected documentation that was related to adult education and literacy in Liberia. This included different kinds of project reports, monthly and quarterly monitoring reports, evaluation reports, and strategy papers. Donors provided me with both project material as well with material more directed towards publicity work. I also gathered material related to legislation on alternative basic education and locally produced assessments and briefing papers.

At the Nordic Africa Institute in 2015, a fountain of knowledge opened for me. For a whole month, I concentrated on deepening my understanding of Liberian history and its context and meeting with scholars that had an interest in Liberia. I managed to locate original documentation from the 1980s on NAEAL from the British Library for Development Studies. These documents, together with the wise words of Mats Utas, "in Liberia it's always about networks" (Interview 10 December 2015, Utas, field diary) made me realize the importance of the local institutions for NAEAL.

Notes in my research diary amount to approximately one hundred typed pages. The research diary shows how painfully my pre-understandings changed. An example of this change was the World Bank-financed EPAG project. I interviewed the staff on all visits, but it was only on my third visit that I went to see the EPAG trainings. I had thought that with World Bank money the conditions would be nice, but in reality, the locations were similar to the other projects. There were desks for the girls, toilets, and blackboards, but otherwise, everything was developing-country basic. What I had not expected was the enthusiasm for learning and testimonies full of self-esteem, dreams of becoming a successful businesswoman, and flipcharts full of analysis of gender-related issues and concrete business plans. (Field diary 28 November 2013)

I collected a fair amount of material from the communities through observation, interviews, and with the help of NAEAL and FRC staff members. I used a FRC or NAEAL car to visit the communities, and they had been informed of my visit in advance. Community members did not seem to differentiate between a monitoring visit, an evaluator, or a researcher, and they would first tell a story they thought a donor representative wished to hear. They also saw it as an opportunity to get more money for the community. They started by talking about problems with infrastructure, roads and wells that were not functioning, and then about lights and better facilities needed for the literacy circles and finally about phase two of the literacy circle. Reverting to AI made it possible to change the tone from problems to the strengths and resources they in fact had. The visits to the communities provided me with an understanding of the conditions for the work of NAEAL's field monitors, the facilitators and what a literacy circle meant.

Table 2 gives an overview of the various events I attended and the distribution of these between the three field trips. The workshops arranged together with NAEAL and FRC provided a wealth of information on how the staff perceived monitoring and evaluation. The recording of workshops turned out to be difficult. Usually, the air conditioner and other noise overpowered the recording. To capture the ideas presented in the workshops I took notes on flip charts during the sessions and afterward I prepared a report or minutes that were then distributed to the participants and commented on by them. This served as a validation of my understandings and provided documentation for NAEAL on their learning processes. These documents form a part of my research data.

TABLE 2 Visits and events

	Spring 2012	Autumn 2012	Autumn 2013
Communities and literacy circles	Facilitator refresher training (Low-Cost Village, Montserrado) 5 communities with eco-pit latrines and 4 communities with a literacy circle visited in Bomi and Cape Mount	ToR questions in 4 communities in Bomi and Cape Mount; 2 communities in Bomi and Cape Mount visited twice for the Alphabet project	Bahn refugee camp in Nimba (piloting of literacy circles in French)
NAEAL	3-day-workshop on M&E Staff Monday meeting	3 half-day workshops on planning an evaluation; coordinators' meeting Staff Monday meeting	2 half-day workshops on learning and dissemination of an evaluation. Staff Monday meeting
Other events	Visit DEN-L in Nimba	NAEAL partners' workshop	LINGO fair NAEAL partners' workshop NAEAL/FRC recreational day
Other donors' projects			ZOA projects in Kakata (Margibi); 4 EPAG groups in Buchanan (Grand Bassa)

It would have been beneficial for my research to go back to Liberia and see how the organization evolved. This, however, became challenging in 2014 when the Ebola virus started to spread in West Africa, including in Liberia, and foreigners were evacuated from the country. To substantiate my data I have, therefore, strived to update the presented data with secondary data and information and referenced contemporary research and literature in the dissertation.

3.4 Analysis of the research material

In what follows, I will explain the steps that I took to make sense of and analyse my data. Firstly, the collected material needed to be processed so that it could be adapted to data management software that eased the coding and grouping of the utterances found in the material. After that, I analysed the material from an accountability perspective and found that to be inadequate for understanding the case. Finally, with the help of concepts from organizational institutionalism, I was able to better grasp the dynamics of the local NGOs' relationships and how it managed the multiple legitimacy pressures exerted on it.

3.4.1 Processing of the research material

The very first step was to secure a careful transcription of the interview tapes, which were mainly in Liberian English. Interviews that contained the richest information and that were of sufficiently high fidelity were transcribed by a local secretary that I was able to locate through the LINGO e-mail lists. I received nine applications and chose Ms Bofa, who seemed to be the most professional. I gave her oral and written instructions on how the transcriptions should be done so that they would then be easily adaptable to the ATLAS.ti programme. ATLAS.ti is a data management and analysis software that supports coding and systematic analysis of qualitative data. The transcriptions had a fair amount of spelling mistakes, as especially when non-Liberians spoke or the vocabulary was related to development cooperation, Ms Bofa had difficulties following. Therefore, I made a thorough round of cross-checking the transcriptions against the tapes.

I had already marked each interview with letters and numbers that indicated the type of actor and the order of the visit that the interview had been conducted. For example, D32 would be donor number three and an interview on the second trip to Liberia in Autumn 2012. A number in front of this signifier would indicate the order of the interview, for example 29D32, would be my 29th interview. Within the text, most of the interviewees are referred to by their position in their respective organizations in order to anonymize them. Where names are used, they are pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the informants.

In addition to the interview material, notes from research journals, documents, and recordings from workshops were inserted into the ATLAS.ti programme after I had written them out and turned them into RTF format, which was compatible with the programme.

3.4.2 Initial analysis and revision of the research focus

My initial set of research questions was very much linked to monitoring and evaluation and the respective practices and how they contributed to learning and accountability. As I went through the material I looked first for utterances on monitoring and evaluation, be they on tools, experiences or attitudes. The first round of coding and making sense of the data concentrated on different actors' perceptions of M&E practices and possible utterances of control, conflicts, and resistance. I was also interested in learning stemming from M&E practices. With the help of the ATLAS.ti programme, I was able to create categories based on different actors as well as on different motivations, such as learning and accountability. Many of the references made to M&E practices had an element of upwards accountability that seemed to be important for the donors as they needed to provide information for their headquarters, consortiums, and back donors.

I started to familiarize myself with literature on principal–agent relationships (Jensen & Meckling 1976; Eisenhardt 1989; Caers et al. 2006) and went through the material with these lenses.[3] Upon a further close reading of the material, themes related to shared goals, collaboration, and reciprocity started to emerge, which led to a new review of the theoretical literature (Huttunen 2010, 59). At this stage, stewardship theory[4] (Van Slyke 2007; Van Puyvelde et al. 2012) and relationships within development cooperation (Eyben 2006) were included in the toolbox, as these helped to understand quotes on unofficial meetings and discussions, encounters during field trips, and other occasions that seemed to indicate trust-building.

The results from this phase of my research were presented in an article in Finnish (Onali 2014). In it, I conclude that a myriad of M&E tools and practices were used by donors to secure their own back donors' information needs and

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[3] The main premise of the agency theory is that a principal hires an agent to provide services for the principal. The assumption in this economic theory is that the agent has selfish interests that conflict with the principal's interests (Caers et al. 2006). Another source of tension is the fact that the agent has more information on her own abilities and on the amount of work that she has put into the contract. The lack of trust and information leads to incentives and to control mechanisms that cause costs both to the principal and to the agent. These are called agency costs (Jensen & Meckling 1976). In development cooperation these costs are related to, for example, monitoring, reporting and evaluation, accounting and auditing. Agency theory is especially concerned with situations where policies and goals are fuzzy and difficult to measure, which is also the reality in development cooperation. The long aid chains put the development actors in a position of both principal and agent as the intermediaries are agents for their donors, but principals in relation to their sub-contractors. For example, a local NGO is an agent in relation to an international donor agency but could also be a principal for a local community-based organization that undertakes parts of a project that the NGO is supervising.

[4] The stewardship theory considers the possibility that the agent, in this case called the steward, shares the goals and interests of the principal. The steward is interested in gaining a positive reputation and in being trustworthy and motivated. There is mutual trust between the parties and with time the steward can be involved in identifying problems and taking decisions. (Van Slyke 2007.) In this situation monitoring is used to identifying possibilities for improving the performance and securing the attainment of mutually shared goals. The amount of monitoring should decrease as the relationship deepens (Eisenhardt 1989).

that this had a lot of transaction costs for both NAEAL and the donors. Although NAEAL had trustful relationships with its donors, these did not diminish the number of accountability mechanisms. This finding contradicted the ideas within the principal-agent theory, which assumes that both the principal and the agent exercise economic rationality.

The idea of treating the communities and the MoE as principals of NAEAL did not work either. For the communities, it seemed to be important that NAEAL's staff would come and visit, talk and engage with people in the communities and continue providing literacy classes. They seemed to have little interest in positioning themselves as principals for NAEAL, which was brokering between the communities and donors to secure funding for the activities.

3.4.3 Analysis of legitimation

I started to understand that learning or even accountability from monitoring and evaluation were not the most relevant questions for my informants in Liberia and that I needed to broaden my understanding of NAEAL's relationships with different stakeholders. Based on the analysis that NAEAL's staff had done in the M&E workshop (NAEAL 2012a), the most important stakeholders appeared to be the donors, the MoE, and the communities.

The longitudinal nature of my study helped me to understand the data and adjust its collection during the three visits to Liberia. As people became more familiar with me and trusted me more, I started to see a difference between what Goffman (1959, in Gould 2004, 278) refers to as the frontstage and backstage narratives. In addition to the frontstage presentations of the politically correct, I was trusted with more open opinions from both the donor and NGO representatives as well as NAEAL staff members.

These findings led to a search of other theories that could better describe what I was encountering. Organizational institutionalism offered an approach to understand the paradoxes between the ideals and expressed principles and the actual practices (Alasuutari 2015, 164) in development cooperation. The idea of seeing development cooperation as an organizational field where the search for legitimacy is the central force provided me with new insights.

I started to look for pieces where my informants talked about relationships with other organizations. New patterns started to form that helped me understand my data as I looked more deeply into NAEAL's relationships with its stakeholders, which I now considered to be legitimacy audiences. It was possible to name actions that NAEAL used in its relationship with each legitimacy audience that were related to different types of legitimacy I had discovered from the literature on organizational institutionalism. Synthesizing the actions indicated distinct managerial strategies towards each legitimacy audience. These findings are presented in chapters five (Ministry of Education), six (donors), and seven (communities). Some of the strategies had been identified in the theoretical literature on organizational institutionalism and some in case studies related to development cooperation that used organizational institutionalism as its theoretical framework. The final stage of the analysis was to see whether the strategies that NAEAL uses with the three legitimacy audiences had common traits. It turned out that there were commonalities and five overall managerial strategies seemed to cover all the legitimacy audiences. These are presented in chapter eight.

My prior exposure to the field of development cooperation as a monitoring and evaluation practitioner created biases in my pre-understanding that needed to be changed (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009, 135). Before entering the field, I read theoretical literature and even tried to discover patterns that other researchers had found in similar situations but was then thrown back to the drawing table by the empirical data found in Liberia. This led to a search of other theories that could describe better what I was encountering. The concept of legitimacy as understood in organizational institutionalism became a central tool for understanding my case and interpreting the relationships of a Southern NGO. The movement between theory and empirical facts during the analysis process is called abduction (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009, 4), and it provided a way to draw plausible explanations from my case study.

NAEAL turned out to be a case of an SNGO that finds itself between the field of development cooperation and the local context. It is embedded in both of these spheres but needs to use distinct actions and strategies towards different legitimacy audiences to be considered as a legitimate actor by them.

3.5 Ethical issues

The basic principles of research ethics emphasize the respect for the persons being studied, doing good and avoiding doing harm, and being just and fair in the distribution of benefits and risks occurring from research. A researcher has responsibilities towards various entities, including the research participants, the research community and the society at large. (Iphofen 2013, 11.) In what follows I concentrate mainly on the actions I took to protect the participants of my study, touch upon some practical hindrances, and feelings of guilt for the "gift of knowledge" given to me, and finally I reflect shortly on the societal implications of my study.

The Finnish Refugee Council granted me permission to engage with their organization and study it in October 2011. They indicated their Liberia country office and local partner as suitable collaborators for my study. FRC's resident representative introduced my desire to research NAEAL and the board discussed the matter and decided to participate in the research. They issued a written research permit on the 3 January 2012.

There are five main considerations when it comes to protecting participants, or informants. They are as follows: Informed consent must be acquired; participants need to enter the research voluntarily; they may withdraw from it anytime; the information they share must be kept confidential; and the anonymity of the informants need to be secured. (Iphofen 2013.)

In my study informed consent was gained by starting each interview with an explanation of my research and asking for the consent of the interviewee. The consent was recorded on tape. Liberians rely more on the spoken than the written word and therefore I did not consider it feasible to collect written consent forms because that would have caused more confusion than clarity. As Canella and Lincoln (2007, 331) state, the acquisition of written consent is problematic in cultures that rely more on a person's word or a handshake to indicate agreement. I stressed that the interview was voluntary and that the information would be used for my study purposes only. I also explained the process of data management, which included recording the interviews, transcribing them, and storing them safely. The anonymity of the informants and the confidentiality of the information provided have been secured by anonymizing all the interviewees. Some of the locations have also been given pseudonyms.

Although I introduced myself as an independent researcher and PhD candidate wanting to learn more about Liberia, my close connection to a donor office certainly compromised my independence in the eyes of NAEAL staff and, for example, the Ministry of Education.

I was able to create a relaxed atmosphere by asking general questions at the beginning of an interview and by showing that I was receiving very good and interesting information. Since I had no prior exposure to Liberia, practically everything was new to me. In some cases, like with the women in literacy circles, having children would be a common denominator for us.

Liberian English, however, caused a "small, small" problem. Especially in the communities, where people spoke the local language, NAEAL and FRC staff members assisted by translating the local English to me and my English to the community members. As the topics of discussion were not overly sensitive, I think the translation did not compromise the confidentiality of the discussions. On most occasions, people in the communities also wanted to talk in groups, not individually.

For example, Iphofen (2013) mentions the "gift" of data that a researcher receives from the informants. I felt very strongly that I was receiving much more from people than what I was giving back to them. The feeling of guilt for taking up people's time also contributed to the fact that I tried to pay it back by organizing workshops for NAEAL staff on evaluation capacity development, which seems naïve in retrospect. My starting point was also to find the ideal evaluation capacity development model, in line with Preskill and Boyle (2008), which I now view as prescriptive and normative. From the project "Towards evaluation for everyday use" I had also learned that even though a practitioner-researcher may enter an organization with good intentions of an open-ended and transformative process, the intervention may still further mainstream approaches and reinforce and reproduce the mechanisms of the organizational field of development cooperation (Kontinen & Onali 2017). Despite my intentions to be critical of the coercive influences of the field and to stress the learning perspective of M&E, I also contributed to stressing the importance of M&E as a tool and a requirement within the field.

I am glad that I was able to discover some of the history of the organization. The interviews with long-term members of NAEAL provided extensive information that could be shared during the timeline exercise (see page 86). In addition to that, I found documents from the 1980s from the archives of the British Library for Development Studies. From the internet, I also recovered pieces of history dating back to the first executive director of the organization and its links to different personalities in Liberian history. I would like to think these aspects are important also for NAEAL as a recollection of its past.

Finally, the question of responsibility for not doing more harm than good and the potential wider societal effects of my research emerges. The SNGOs are very dependent on international aid money. To survive, they need to know the basics of the workings of the system, so a profoundly critical stance towards the field of development cooperation on the part of the practitioner-researcher would not be fruitful, either. Looking back, I suppose the ways to give back are more in producing knowledge and disseminating it to different audiences at conferences and seminars as well as in publications. My role is more in influencing the organizational field of development cooperation to the extent that I can mainly through facilitating trainings for Finnish NGOs and being involved in the academic discussion in Finland and internationally.

3.6 Reflections on the research process

In line with the social constructivist tradition, there is an interplay between the researcher and the object of study. It is important to be aware of one's role and how it may affect the people and the organizations that are being studied but also how they simultaneously influence the researcher and the research process (Haynes 2012, 17). The researcher's preunderstandings, as well as personal and academic background, will have an impact on how the research evolves and what kind of interpretations are given. In line with Haynes's (2012) categorization on reflexivity I will reflect first on the cultural, social, and political aspects of my research and turn then to the emotional and subjective dimensions of the research process.

3.6.1 Cultural, social, and political reflections

As for the cultural, social, and political in my research, the power dimension is the most troubling aspect. I might have unwillingly reconstructed the power imbalances present in development cooperation with my presence. Although I introduced myself as an independent researcher, many of my informants may have confused me with an evaluator, as they were not familiar with the term *research*. Liberia could be defined as a high-power distance country (Hofstede 1980) and appointments usually require a gatekeeper, or someone higher up, to set up a meeting at a similar level. To obtain access to organizations and informants, I needed the help and connections of the FRC Resident

Representative and NAEAL's Executive Director. This made me look more like a development consultant than a researcher. The limited time frame of my visits added to my consultant-like performance in the field. During the first meeting with the executive director, I was able to request whom I would like to meet and interview during my stay and he would set up the meetings for me. I wished to interview the MoE, donor representatives and LMC's, facilitators and learners as well as NAEAL staff members. As for the staff members, I suppose they didn't have the possibility to say no because the meetings were set up by the boss. I, however, tried to explain to them that they did have the possibility to decline the interview and secured informed consent for it. Some of them were clearly nervous and I spent a lot of time setting a relaxed mood for the interview.

The higher-up people, like a member of the board, a donor representative, local umbrella organization's executive director, set a time limit for the interview because they had other engagements to attend. With some of these people I felt out of place and tried to give a professional and firm impression of myself and made sure that I kept the time limit given to me. These feelings are part of my background, as is the fact that the upper strata of society are alien to me. I return to this when I reflect on my subjective experiences and growth during the research process.

Meanwhile, as an insider to the field of development cooperation, there was a common language and a sense of similarity with many of the donor representatives. The negative side of looking like a donor comes in when people see you as a potential source of money. During the field trips, some people came to me in the hope of obtaining financing for their personal or community projects. In addition, the price of the transcription services increased with each visit. Fortunately, I am a former financial administrator and had no financial resources to spare so I had some experience of how to negotiate these situations.

Relations with informants evolved over the course of the three field trips. With time, people became more accustomed to my presence and were more relaxed around me. During the two latter visits, people started to approach me and talk about things that happened in their lives and within the organization. There seemed to be a deeper connection and openness as people started to share their ambitions, reflections from their own personal transformation, and also about other people's grievances. I think that the workshops had also made me more accessible and less threatening. Workshopping and participation were also something familiar to them because it is such an integral part of the development business, but also a part of what NAEAL does. They themselves were facilitators and specialists in social engagement. They could observe me as a facilitator, and interact with me during group work and recess. Seeing me make a fool of myself during energizers and exercises, and revealing my ignorance made the atmosphere more relaxed.

I also provided distraction and amusement in the communities and on the Bahn refugee camp for people. Children would be open about their amusement of seeing a white person and would come and touch me or shout *qwi*, *qwi* (white, white) at me. I was also a distinguished guest. During my visit to the Bahn refugee camp, the following day was the International Day of People with Disability and I got to meet the group that was preparing a programme for the festivities. They asked me to stay, and I and the NAEAL personnel decided to postpone our return to Monrovia. Our presence and the support and solidarity were very much appreciated.

3.6.2 Emotional reflections

What I miss from my time as a development practitioner in the South is the feeling of being alive, and the feeling that more things happen there in a month than do in Finland in a year. In Liberia, I felt at home again. I suppose it is a survival mechanism to look for familiar features in a new environment – for me, this meant comparing Liberia to Mozambique and Nicaragua, the places where I have lived and worked for some years. Liberia brought back memories from Mozambique from the 1980s and 1990s – during the civil war and after the peace agreement – as much of the infrastructure had been destroyed in the war and some people were seemingly traumatized, and in both places the spiritual world was important. The difference was that there were not many foreign donors in Mozambique at that time and the government had some say in who did what in the country. The green hills and valleys and the easy-going people reminded me of another place I consider personally important, Nicaragua.

I could also relate to the personal histories of the FRC resident representative and the NAEAL administrator, which partly reminded me of my activist days back in the 1980s. I could relate to what the administrator meant with a fire burning inside a 21-year-old that aims to change the world for the better. The FRC resident representative had numerous stories to tell about his fascinating personal history from different parts of Africa. Especially after he accepted me as one of his kind, and not just an arrogant academic, the sharing of memories became mutual. Through my host and his family, I got to go to weddings, nightlife, children's birthdays, the beach, and the US Embassy's Christmas sales as well as parties that he organized in his capacity as the Honorary Consul of Finland. I also attended parties at the UNMIL and Swedish Embassy and the local businesses because I was his friend. I learned so much during my brief visits by having this special entry to different spheres of life in Liberia.

My main cultural guide was Henry, the FRC project officer that accompanied me on the field trips and explained to me local practices and meanings and translated Liberian English to me in the communities. We worked together on the workshops, which gave us an opportunity to learn from each other's ways of facilitation. This also says something about the similarities and differences between the dynamics of the Liberian and Finnish NGO sectors. Henry had the opportunity to visit Finland and the FRC, which made him see Finland and Finns from a new angle, not just as the purse and donor but also as dedicated practitioners.

Sad events occurred as well. The Ebola outbreak affected the families of people that I had become close with. Moreover, two of my key informants died soon after my first visit. The administrator that had given me a difficult time during my first interviews passed away because of medical malpractice. It was only afterward that I could see how valuable the interview material recorded with him was. The executive director that had hoped that my work would contribute to the organizational development of NAEAL had passed away just a couple of months earlier. The death of these two champions was very much felt during my second field trip, as everybody wanted to discuss the issue and how it had touched them.

There was a strange feeling of safety. I could walk on the streets and get in a local taxi, or even stroll in the marketplace. Things that are not common for a white female in many places and that you would not expect in a place with a history like Liberia. The main feeling that I had during my trips was that everybody wanted to take care of me. At the same time, one is forced to let go of the part of one's personal freedom because of dependency on transport and ad hoc opportunities to meet with people or take part in unforeseen events.

This was also part of hospitality towards visitors. I was a visitor, one of those that come and go, and it is hard to learn their names. I think when researchers talk about studying "the Other" (see e.g. Spivak 1988; Said 2003), they think too highly of the Western scholars. We, the white people, the foreigners, are the other. We are the visitors, strangers, passers-by, and after we leave people continue their lives. They impact our lives more than we do theirs because for us the experience is so profound and emotional.

3.6.3 Subjective reflections

My background in praxis brought with it both hindering and enabling factors for my research process. In a similar vein, my social background has had its effect on my becoming a researcher. Furthermore, cultural distance from my research site was enormous because I was a newcomer to Liberia. However, I was rather familiar with the organizational field of development cooperation, which also had implications for my pre-understanding of what might evolve from my research. Another aspect that made me feel at the margins of the academic field was the fact that I was studying the field where I normally work. I tended to downplay my capacities as an academic but, at the same time, I was becoming alienated from practice as well and becoming a stranger in both worlds.

Both as a practitioner and now as a researcher my social status during field trips has been higher than at home, a phenomenon that Scheyvens and Donovan (2003, 18) have also noted. This time around I got to interview people from high up in donor organizations, leaders of local NGOs, and churches. I participated in seminars and events where ambassadors and the vice-president were present. I had breakfast with the Under-Secretary of State of Finland and met frequently with high-ranking UNMIL officers.

This made me feel like an imposter that will sooner or later be revealed. This was combined with the fact that I also feel like a stranger to the academic world. With two master's degrees and a PhD on its way, I still feel inadequate as an academic. This is due to my background in a non-academic family. My parents had little schooling and my interest in books was never appreciated. This has had the consequence of feeling out of place in academia and a lack of courage to take one's place in the discussions even in situations when I would have enough competence to be part of the debate.

This phenomenon of upwards social mobility, or class hike, has been discussed in Finland by Järvinen and Kolbe (2007). With reference to Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, they explain how academic education changes the way to construct one's world and to be in it. Academic education alienates us from the childhood family and people, while at the same time leaving us on the outskirts of the academic world because we, the country girls from non-academic families, feel that we do not have the capacity to take part in the discussion because it has not been something we learned at home. (Järvinen & Kolbe 2007, 159.)

I started at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Helsinki in 1982 and have been studying on-and-off for most of the time since then. I have found the combination of study and practice fruitful since when coming across the absurdities of the field of development cooperation, studies and research have been the means to clear my thoughts and mind, and a tool to clarify my own goals and the goals of the respective organizations where I have worked. This means that I have been part of the aid system, but I do not share Tvedt's (2006) position that researchers should keep themselves outside the aid system to be able to study it.

My experience in practical development work was useful for my research. I entered the field like a consultant, which meant I could take full use of the short time that I had in Liberia during each visit. I was familiar with the practical conditions of development work, so it was fairly easy to manage in a new environment and to conduct interviews and workshops. I was also used to quick changes in schedules and new opportunities opening up rapidly as well as the inaction and sudden obstacles that make your plans impossible to put into action.

When reflecting on my actions it becomes clear that my background in economics and development practice have influenced my thinking in an unconscious way (Hirsjärvi et al. 2009). Training in classical economics emphasized clear causality links. It has taken me a while to settle for plausible connections and outright uncertainty. My work experience has also been very much on the control side of development cooperation. I have worked as a financial expert on Finnish bi-lateral aid projects, with quality management, and in facilitating the creation of planning, monitoring and evaluation systems in NGOs. All of these fields carry the idea that you need to have a "system in place" and follow the rules.

The project world is oriented towards achieving pre-set objectives, whereas research is about finding new paths and new answers. Being introduced to Appreciative Inquiry has made a great difference in my personal orientation towards the need to control and to give space for what already works instead of fixing things. A course on AI with InDialogue and being coached by experienced consultants and facilitators that told me I could not determine the outcome of a process, only provide structure and create a safe atmosphere, was a turning point in letting go of control for me.

Although my understanding of the realities of the Liberian people and their organizations was minimal, the field of development cooperation, ironically, brought along features that are familiar to me. Being immersed in the realities of Liberia made it clear that reality is different for different people socially and psychologically (Denzin & Lincoln 2011, 13). It depends on time, place, language, culture, social position, and previous understandings and experiences. With intuition and empathy, one can try to grasp another person's reality by using imagination to put oneself in the shoes of others (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2009). I as the researcher could also become part of the local realities as well as be part of the co-creation of understandings (Denzin & Lincoln 2011, 13) with my local informants.

3.7 Chapter conclusions

This chapter has presented the methodological choices of this study. Methodologically, the study draws influences from different approaches that have been used to study development NGOs. The study forms part of the emerging field of NGO studies within organizational institutionalism and the case study approach was enriched with tools from ethnography and action research.

The case organization, the National Adult Education Association of Liberia, was introduced. It exemplifies an SNGO that is embedded in the field of development cooperation as well as the local context and which needs to take into account a multiplicity of stakeholders to be considered a legitimate actor in both of these spheres.

The data collection was conducted during three field visits to Liberia in 2012 and 2013. The data consisted of interviews with the staff and board members of the case NGO and its donors, as well as government and civil society representatives. In addition, field notes on participant observation and a series of workshops were included in the data along with other documentation. After the field work, the data has been continuously updated with secondary data and information as well as with contemporary research and literature.

The data were coded with the help of the ATLAS.ti programme and analysed and interpreted abductively over various rounds of sensemaking between the data and corresponding literature.

The chapter concluded with ethical considerations and reflections on the research process as I reflected on my personal and academic background that had a bearing on the way this research evolved and the conclusions I drew from it.

4 INTERTWINED HISTORIES OF NAEAL AND LIBERIA

In this chapter, I provide the local historical and institutional contextualization of the case NGO analysed in this study, the National Adult Education Association of Liberia, NAEAL. In institutionalist thinking, it is important to trace the origins of institutions, because they will be important for understanding the critical turning points and path dependencies (Alasuutari 2015) as well as the normative rules in different times in history (Powell & DiMaggio 1991, 7). This historical overview will provide historical contextualization of the main legitimacy audiences of NAEAL, namely, the Ministry of Education as a representative of the government, the donors as representatives of the field of development cooperation, and the local communities. It will also show how the organization evolved and changed during different periods of national history.

The fact that the history and transformations of NAEAL were embedded in the societal and political history of Liberia from its initiation in 1977 until today became clear in the group exercise that was done during a workshop (NAEAL 2012a) in which the story of the nation and the organization were told side-by-side. (Figure 1) The timeline was drawn with all the staff members saying when they started and listening to the stories of people that had been with the organization since the 1980s. The national history was drawn parallel to the organization, and it became evident that the organization had been conditioned by the changes in the national context as well as the paradigms of international aid. The timeline was crosschecked with interviews conducted in early 2012 with the chair of the board who had been with the organization since its foundation in 1977, a staff member that had started at the beginning of the 1980s, and with the executive director, who had been with the NGO since 2006. Some annual plans, reports, strategy papers, and evaluations from the 1980s and 2000s that were available have also been consulted during the writing of this chapter.

FIGURE 1 The Story of NAEAL – timeline

Source: NAEAL 2012a

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the history of Liberia to enable us to see how the evolution of local institutions and practices have affected the development of the country and the institutions that are still relevant today, such as the secret societies, powerful presidents and ethnic divisions. The so-called secret societies were powerful even before the settlers from America came in the 1820s and the international community enhanced their power during the reconstruction period after the devastating civil wars in 1989 to 2003. The way to govern the country established by the settlers led to a concentration of power in the hands of the president and laid the groundwork for a patron–client system (see e.g. Chabal & Daloz 1999) and big-men networks in Liberia. The ethnic division first between the settlers that came from the United States and the local people that were already living on the Pepper Coast and later on among the locals led to an armed conflict that lasted for 14 years.

The effects of the changes in the historical and institutional context on the organizational attributes of NAEAL will be analysed in parallel as I move on to discuss the different phases of NAEAL's history alongside the changes in the Liberian state. Different governments' policies towards adult literacy have mainly been supportive of NAEAL's work; however, NAEAL has been dependent on the political climate of the country and the resources available from the national government and the international community. The times of turbulence caused by the civil wars during 1989 to 2003 meant hard times also for NAEAL. The consequent period of reconstruction introduced the organization to the field of international development cooperation and the donor policies that have had a significant influence on the organization's development.

4.1 Settlers and locals

The West African country of Liberia has an intriguing and violent history. Liberia as a sovereign state was founded in 1847 by freed American slaves that immigrated to the shores of the Pepper Coast with the help of the American Colonization Society (ACS) (van der Kraaij 2015). The entry of these so-called Americo-Liberians and the institutions and dilemmas they brought with them have influenced the history of Liberia, and still today affect the country. One of these aspects was the emergence of ethnic divides, especially between the Americo-Liberians and the "locals". The newcomers established control over the territory that paved way for a very powerful presidency and a system of patronage that controlled the distribution of wealth. In addition to these, they also brought a new religion, language, and values to the Pepper Coast. The settlers of American origin had as their slogan "The love of liberty brought us here". Ironically, the newcomers excluded the indigenous population from ruling the country. The local populations consisted of sixteen major indigenous groups that had their traditions, religious beliefs and languages (Bøås 2009). This exclusion would finally lead to the devastating civil wars from 1989 to 2003.

4.1.1 Local governance systems

Before the settlers came, the local people's governance systems were formed around chiefs and secret societies for men and women. The people that lived on the Pepper Coast spoke languages that can be grouped into three ethnolinguistic groups, that is, Mande, Mel, and Kwa (Levitt 2005, 17). Out of these groups, the Mel (north-western Liberia) and Mande (north-central and south-eastern Liberia) speaking peoples had a system of centralized chieftaincy that was composed of hierarchical patrilineal systems, the most important lineage being the one that came from the founding ancestors. The most important political structure was composed by the Poro (all-male) and Sande (all-female) secret societies that could be considered as a schooling system and an initiation for both males and females into the societies was compulsory (Fuest 2010). These so-called "bush schools" could extend to two to three years and during that time the initiates would provide free labour for the elders. The power and authority of the leaders of the secret societies, called *zoes*, was derived from their abilities that were kept secret from others. They could mediate between the community and the supernatural world as they had contacts with invisible spirits that could temporarily enter a person, especially when wearing a mask (Ellis 2007, 201). They also possessed knowledge of medicines that others did not have (Fuest 2010). The Poro had both spiritual and political as well as social and judicial power and they would also decide on economic affairs. The villages and states formed by villages were connected through the Poro authority structure, and the Poro elders would also select and remove rulers. (Levitt 2005, 21-23.)

The Kwa that lived on the central and eastern coast formed small but non-centralized societies arranged around age sets. The Council of Elders was the main authority, and a person would gain prestige and privilege through chronological age. The Kwa secret society, called the Kwi, was not as important as the Poro system, and the Kwa elders would solicit the opinions of the whole community, women and youth included, for major issues. (Levitt 2005, 23–25.) The multiplicity of spiritual and political leaders constituted a system of checks and balances and, for example, if a local chief should abuse his power, a masked spirit (Ellis 2007, 204) could publicly embarrass him.

Warriors were also respected because they brought back plunder, goods, cattle, and slaves that were then shared among the villagers. This was a way for a young man to gain more power, especially if he also attained a religious position (Utas 2003, 89). Utas (2003, 95) sees the role of the Poro as a guarantor of peace and stability by older generations opposed to the conflict-prone youth on the other side. This makes Utas (2003, 95) conclude that as both missionaries and various governments have suppressed the Poro, this has provided more space for the increased influence of military institutions.

Before the arrival of the settlers from America, the local people had already been in contact with various foreign influences. The Portuguese explorers, followed by British and Dutch tradesmen, had landed on the Pepper Coast. The coastal people maintained relationships with sailors and traders and bartered local products and slaves for firearms, alcohol, and other commodities. Other African people came from the north and the north-west, from current day Mali and Guinea. One of these groups was the Mandingo, who were Muslim and mainly traders.

The slave trade that had started in the late 17th century along the coastal line ranging from modern-day Ivory Coast, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (Jones & Johnson 1980) continued at the beginning of the 19th century from the inner parts of Africa over the Atlantic. The European colonial powers, the British and French, were expanding their territories (Levitt 2005, 20). These developments meant the lessening of the importance of the old authority structures, as different groups sought alliances with each other and adapted to outside influences. This led to the emergence of the idea of ethnic identity, as the different groups would fight over territory and the control of the slave and other trade. (Levitt 2005, 26-27.)

4.1.2 Colonization by freed slaves

There were one to two million African Americans in the United States at the beginning of the 19th century, when a movement to "repatriate" them to Africa started forming (van der Kraaij 2015, 2). There were various motives behind the movement, which consisted of white priests, and both slave owners as well as people that opposed slavery. The slave owners were afraid of the influence that freed slaves might have on their business, whereas others had humanitarian or religious reasons, as well as racist reasons, to promote the movement. The ACS, which had the support of the US government (van der Kraaij 2015, 2), organized the resettlement. The ACS settled some ten thousand African Americans to the Pepper Coast between 1821 and 1867. The American colonists started to call the place "Liberia", with reference to the word *liberty*. The capital was named Monrovia after James Monroe, who was the fifth president of the United States, from 1817 to 1825, and a member of the ACS.

At about the same time, another group ended up on the shores of the Pepper Coast. The Congos were slaves from the Congo basin area that had been rescued by English and Americans from ships as the African slave trade was ending. They spoke no English nor any of the local languages. They were both outsiders, so the Congos and Americo-Liberians joined forces against the local inhabitants. The Congos were mainly held as house slaves or adoptees by the Americo-Liberians, who wanted to expand their group as they started to seek to dominate their new surroundings. The settlers considered themselves far better than the local "uncivilized" people because of their Christian religion and American ways of political, cultural, and social life. The local inhabitants could be accepted on the edges of the new elite circles if they adopted the settler ways of life. Strategies that the local communities used ranged from acceptance to resistance. Some would cooperate with the newcomers as it would protect them from other, perhaps even more powerful, and vicious, groups; others wished to protect their economic interests, especially in trade, and then others would resist the new order.

In the beginning, the settlers remained in the coastal region. The contacts with the local communities were mainly for trade in commodities or slaves and conflicts over land. It was only towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century that control was extended to the inland. The English and the French were expanding their influence in the region and the settlers saw the need to protect themselves. As the US had no intentions of defending them, their option remained a declaration of independence. The Republic of Liberia was established in 1847 and the new state was recognized by, for example, France, England, and Germany. (Sawyer 2005, 13.) The constitution was drafted to model the US constitution, with separation of the executive, legislative and judicial powers. The president was the head of the state and the legislative body consisted of the House of Representatives and the Senate. The True Whig Party that represented the Americo-Liberian interests dominated the political scene as well as elections.

As the territorial problems continued, the new rulers established a system of indirect rule that consisted of commissioners appointed by the government that would oversee the people living inland. The district commissioners in their turn put in place a system of paramount chiefs that collaborated with the central government and controlled the local people. The system was reinforced by the establishment of the Liberian Frontier Force, a brutal army which later formed the basis for the Armed Forces of Liberia. The locals were taxed and used as forced labour. Gradually, the district commissioners were able to establish a system of patronage that worked to their advantage and extended state control in the Liberian hinterland. Both the armed forces and the commissioners were directly controlled by the president, which increased his powers and authority. (Ellis 2007, 42.)

Entering the 19th century multiplicity of realities and institutions existed in the Liberian territory. There were different types of ethnic groups ranging from different ethnolinguistic groups to Muslim Mandingos to Christian Americo-Liberians. Chiefs and secret societies that were usually older people led the chiefdoms. Young men could gain prestige by engaging in warfare and bringing home the booty of war. The settlers established a new form of patronage that was centred on the president, who was able to use the district commissioners to extend state control and collect resources from the hinterlands.

4.1.3 Powerful presidents and increasing political tensions

During the coming years, the powers of the president grew even more. William Tubman was Liberia's president from 1944 to 1971, and he was represented as the father of the nation and a personality cult grew around him.

According to Tubman, Liberia had never received the "benefits of colonization" by which he meant the investments that colonial powers had made in other African countries' infrastructure and health and educational systems. An official Open Door economic policy was established, with concession agreements signed with foreign investors who could then take advantage of the country's natural resources, which at the same time provided revenues for the president. (Ellis 2007, 44.) During his presidency, Tubman made investments in infrastructure with the revenues that the country gained from its Open Door policies towards foreign investment and pro-Western sympathies. Tubman was also a close ally of the US during the Cold War, which guaranteed him the protection of the US. (Ellis 2007, 44-45.)

The annual rate of economic growth was more than seven percent annually during from 1955 to 1975 and the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was up to 1765 USD. The growth rates were dependent on only a few sectors of the economy, such as iron ore, rubber, and cash crops for export. A small elite controlled the economy while the majority of the population worked in subsistence agriculture. The state of the human capital was poor, as illiteracy was widespread, with 75 percent of people over the age of 15 illiterate. (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs 2013, 2.)

As part of his modernization policies, Tubman increased educational opportunities in the interior of the country, which led to more people searching for employment in the state bureaucracy. In the 1960s, Tubman extended suffrage first to settler women and then to the indigenous communities. A major constitutional reform took place when new county jurisdictions were established and the counties in the interior became more equal to the coastal counties, which were dominated by the Americo-Liberians.

These reforms increased demands for more democratic participation in the country's affairs (Sawyer 2005, 16) and Tubman's successor, William R. Tolbert Jr. (president from 1971 to 1980), continued the liberal reforms by including some members of the indigenous majority into the government. The changes were considered excessive by the Americo-Liberians and too slow by the majority of the people.

A growing number of young people that had been educated in the United States and were inspired by the growing African nationalism as well as Marxist ideas, started to form civil society groups that were in opposition to the government. The Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) was established in 1973 by Amos Sawyer and others at the University of Liberia (established in 1862), and it consisted of students and workers. It advocated for social justice, rule of law, and democratization. The Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL), established in 1975, was able to mobilize unemployed and underemployed people with the aspiration for multiparty elections. An umbrella organization of Liberians living in the United States, the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA), was also established during the 1970s. Many of these associations were linked to different ethnic groups and counties within Liberia. (van der Kraaij 2015, 41–42.)

Tolbert could not respond to the rising expectations that coincided with economic decline caused by the rise in oil prices and excessive government spending. The general bitterness led to the so-called rice riots in 1979 when the government intended to increase the price of rice, the local staple food. (van der Kraaij 2015, 32–33.) The president himself was a major producer of rice in the country, which created suspicions regarding the true motivation of the government. Tolbert's era ended in 1980 when he was killed during a coup d'état by the Armed Forces of Liberia, led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe of Krahn origin. As Doe did not have a pool of contacts to run the country, he surrounded himself with members of Krahn, one of the smallest ethnic groups in Liberia, which led to hostilities with other groups.

These were the times of the Cold War and the Reagan administration (1981–89) in the United States. Liberia became an important base for the US in Western Africa as it hosted the Voice of America transmission station and the Omega communication tower that monitored maritime transport in the Atlantic Ocean, while Monrovia served as a CIA base (van der Kraaij 2015, 49). In return for Doe's pro-US stance, Liberia received abundant economic and military assistance from the US.

Gradually, however, Doe grew to be a liability to the US as his taste for power increased and he suppressed all opposition. He organized elections in 1985 and declared himself the winner, although according to the observers Jackson Doe of Gio origin had won the elections. A coup attempt later that year by General Thomas Quiwonkpa, also of Gio origin, failed and increased the hostilities towards Gio and Mano especially in Nimba County. Doe's soldiers killed Quiwonkpa and his body was humiliated, which according to the traditional beliefs increased the "juju" of Doe, giving him more prestige, power, and protection against his enemies. (van der Kraaij 2015, 54–56.) Doe's regime, which had started as an uprising against the Americo-Liberian minority, ended with a dangerous amount of resentment among various ethnic groups.

4.2 The story of NAEAL

It was in this political context that NAEAL's history began and evolved. From 1977 to 1989, literacy teachers organized themselves, were capacitated, and built international networks. The good progress was interrupted by the period of civil war (1989–2003), which meant hard times for NAEAL. During the war and after, the organization took part in international donors' efforts to reconstruct the country. In doing so, it partly lost its identity and had to spend the years from 2008 to 2010 to restore its mission and its credibility as a local NGO. In what follows, I describe the evolution of NAEAL during the different historical periods from the 1970s until the 2010s.

4.2.1 Literacy teachers organize themselves (1977–1989)

In the 1950s, the international discourse emphasized education as a key ingredient for economic growth. As part of President Tubman's modernization policies, a literacy programme was initiated in 1948 to fulfil Tubman's dream of a reading Liberia. Dr Frank Laubach, a Christian missionary that had developed a picture-word-sound method for teaching literacy, visited Liberia and inspired President Tubman (Daily Observer 2017). However, at start of the 1970s, the illiteracy rate in Liberia was still over 70 percent. Especially subsistence farmers and unskilled employees were illiterate and needed improvement of their techniques. There was also an increasing number of dropouts from primary and secondary schools.

The Ministry of Education continued its efforts to enhance adult literacy by contracting literacy teachers and facilitators to conduct adult literacy classes in different parts of the country. These teachers organized themselves in 1977 as NAEAL and they considered themselves a pressure group that complemented the MoE's efforts in adult education. NAEAL's identity was anchored in promoting adult literacy and bringing the light of knowledge to the people of Liberia. This is how the chairman of the board of NAEAL explained the motivation behind the organization.

> The idea was for "each one to teach one". This slogan had been copied from Dr Laubach's teachings back in Tubman times and the meaning of it was that everyone that had learned to read had the obligation to teach someone else to read. The motto of NAEAL was "knowledge is light" as the idea was to bring about a reading Liberia where the people could enjoy the "light" that comes with the ability to read and to acquire knowledge. (Interview 6N1, 2 December 2012, Chairman of the Board of NAEAL)

The role of NAEAL was to be a service provider that complemented the efforts of the MoE. The aim was to have as many literacy classes as possible, in homes, schools, and public places such as the YWCA and YMCA. With the MoE's funding, NAEAL was operating two pilot schools that were designed for school dropouts and those who wanted to finish junior high school.

NAEAL also engaged in advocacy for adult literacy among the general public and the government. This included publishing *The New Day Magazine* and NAEAL's quarterly *Newsletter*, which were used to help raise awareness of adult education programmes and to provide easy reading materials for adult learners. The organization was also able to get the government to recognize International Literacy Day, which had been promoted by UNESCO since 1966.

International trends continued to reach Liberia and NAEAL. During the 1970s, literacy was internationally recognized as a fundamental human right. In addition to economic benefits, literacy was considered important in the improvement of self-esteem and attitudinal change as well as for increased political participation. UNESCO (2006) introduced the concept of *functional literacy*, which considered "a functionally literate person to be someone who can engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning in his group and community and for enabling him to continue to use reading, writing, and calculation for his own and the community's development".

The travel of ideas and their adaptation (Czarniawska & Joerges 1996) can be seen in NAEAL´s documentation from the 1980s. Basic education for adults was seen as a fundamental universal right that would contribute to social justice among people and to the self-development of the individual. For NAEAL, *functional literacy* meant all the different things that made the person more capable of sustaining him/herself and the family. Because of this, functional literacy programmes could, in addition to reading, writing, and basic arithmetic, include weaving, basketry, carving, and blacksmithing or improvement of farming techniques. (NAEAL 1988.)

Initially, the cadre of literacy teachers had been established in collaboration with Methodist, Episcopal, and Lutheran churches (Daily Observer 2014). Literacy in Liberia, as in many other parts of the world, has also been part of missionaries' agenda in promoting Christianity and people's possibility to study the Bible. The institutional relationship with the Christian churches has since continued for NAEAL with the leadership having members from the clergy. The first president of NAEAL was the Right Reverend Christopher Kandakai (NAEAL 1984), an Episcopal priest that was a fiery preacher that even President Samuel Doe respected (Daily Observer 2015).

Another feature of NAEAL's original forms of governance and structure was the membership base of the organization. The literacy teachers formed chapters that gathered at a national congress, which was the highest decision-making body of NAEAL and convened every second year to review performance and to formulate action plans (NAEAL 1984). The organization had functioning chapters in six counties in 1984 and ten in 1989. As is typical of membership organizations, NAEAL provided services for its members. It arranged national workshops for the chapters to improve their performance because the major concern, according to the documents from the 1980s, was the poor capacity of the literacy teachers. Other needs that were identified concerned the lack of gas lamps, a typewriter, and a full-time secretariat. (NAEAL 1984.) In 1988 NAEAL was able to establish an interim secretariat and it was incorporated as an NGO in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. NAEAL had also purchased an acre of land and was contemplating on establishing a training centre there. (NAEAL 1989.)

NAEAL's position as a literacy organization in Liberia as well as internationally could be considered strong in the 1970s and 1980s. NAEAL was well connected within Liberia because it had institutional members such as the University of Liberia, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and Ministry of Rural Development (NAEAL 1989). In Liberia, social, political, religious, and professional groups overlapped and, for example, civil society associations had more status if they had people in senior positions in government in their ranks (Ellis 2007, 51).

NAEAL members participated actively in international events as the organization had contacts with sister organizations that included the African Association for Literacy and Adult Education (AALAE) as well as adult education associations from Germany, Canada and Denmark. The documents also mention that NAEAL had contacts with USAID, UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, and the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE). Although NAEAL received financial assistance from some of these organizations, it was at the same time a respected member of these networks and was at the forefront of many of the initiatives, such as the AALAE. (NAEAL 1989.)

Initially, from the 1970s until the beginning of the 1990s, NAEAL received a subsidy from the Liberian government for its work. This meant, of course, that NAEAL's history was conditioned by the political aspirations of respective governments in power.

Education is political and adult literacy campaigns have been used for political motives in various places. Although the contents of NAEAL's literacy programme were not considered dubious, the political nature of literacy did come up in Liberia as well. Sargent Samuel Doe had established his rule during the 1980s with the help of the United States and had sworn to be faithful to the capitalist system. All socialist inclinations were unacceptable. At the beginning of the 1980s, a group of young university students had joined NAEAL and this group made a trip to Ethiopia to get acquainted with the mass literacy campaign that was taking place there. The contacts to a communist country led to a conflict with the Doe government and the youngsters were expelled from the organization by the older ranks. This is understandable as NAEAL was dependent on the subsidy from the government and it was important to maintain a good relationship.

Despite its pro-US inclinations, Doe's government represented the indigenous people's resistance towards the Americo-Liberian population, and lifting the large majority out of illiteracy was considered a liberation of the indigenous Liberians. Therefore, both NAEAL and the MoE strived for increasing literacy rates and considered the possibility to provide literacy classes in the local languages, which emphasized the new importance of the 'tribal' Liberians.

By 1987, NAEAL had developed a Technical Assistance Project (TAP), which was intended to build NAEAL's organizational capacity and to form a secretariat that would provide capacity building to the chapters. TAP was launched in 1989 and Partnership Africa Canada (PAC) funded it. By the 19 December 1989, the regional workshops had been completed with the chapters. A national training team was established, and it received training from a Kenyan consultant for 10 days to become trainers of trainers.

> So we did that and then we moved out with these workshops as I said and the last one was done in December 1989 and just a few weeks after we left a place they call Grand Gedeh, in the South East, the civil war was launched. On 31 December 1989, the first bullet was fired and we went into, gradually we went into a civil war. (Interview 14N1, 29 February 2012, Administrator of NAEAL)

Exactly when everything was ready for NAEAL to improve the quality and outreach of its work, the civil war started.

4.2.2 Hard times during the war (1989–2003)

Charles Taylor and an army of 200 men from the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (LPFL) entered the country in 1989 across the border with the Ivory Coast to the county of Nimba. Taylor had been friends with the late Quiwonkpa, which guaranteed him the support of Gio and Mano youth in Nimba. They were the core of his military troops that had been trained in Libya where Taylor was considered a true African revolutionary.

Taylor was well connected. He had studied and lived in the US and was an integral member of the ULAA, which provided him with important contacts in the US. He knew many of the progressive members of MOJA and PAL from the 1970s. He even got financial resources and connections from the Americo-Liberians by promising them dignity and property rights. He had extensive connections to West African leaders and rebels, attracting financial support from, for example, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, and Libya. The US government saw Taylor as a genuine capitalist, and they abandoned Doe because Liberia was no longer of strategic importance to it in Africa. The Cold War had passed with the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the Soviet Union in 1991. US attention was drawn to the invasion of Iraqi forces in Kuwait, which was an important source of oil for the US. (van der Kraaij 2005, 62.)

More and more people that were unhappy with Doe joined the LPFL and in six months, they were able to control 95 percent of the country. The situation led to the Liberian civil war, which lasted from 1989 to 2003 with only short periods of relative calm. More military groups, at least ten of them, and warlords emerged on ethnic grounds and because of political or economic ambitions. The warlords traded in diamonds, timber, rubber, and iron ore for guns, mainly from Europe. Both the warlords and politicians were mainly seeking benefits for their group but in doing this they might occasionally ally and cooperate with the other groups. In addition to the rivalries between ethnic groups, the war also stemmed from deep economic inequalities and struggles over the abundant natural resources of the country. (van der Kraaij 2015, 60–62.)

The war years were described as hard times for the organization by the administrator of NAEAL. However, they were able to do some work within the capital area.

> So after 1990, the war subsided a bit and there was an interim government established in the Monrovia area. So by 1991, 1992 we came back to and tried to clean up and pick up the pieces. We moved to the YMCA building. One of the members of our training team was fortunate to become the Minister of Education and she was instrumental in putting us on the government subsidy and helping NAEAL to get started at the YMCA. This period I am talking about '92, '93, '94 we were in Monrovia but the war was still raging in other parts of the country. So NAEAL was working in areas that were under the control of the peacekeeping forces sent by ECOWAS, the Economic Organization of West African States. NAEAL was engaged in some work with former combatant soldiers, child soldiers providing skills training, peace education, conflict resolution, and all that kind of things. That is how we kept the organization afloat from these contracts and things because by then the government subsidy had stopped. (Interview 14N1, 29 February 2012, Administrator of NAEAL)

The Administrator is referring to the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU) which was headed by Amos Sawyer from November 1990 to August 1993 and was able to work under the protection of the ECOMOG peacekeeping forces that arrived in autumn 1990 and operated in Monrovia and its surroundings. By 1992 forty percent of Liberians had taken refuge in Monrovia, 30 percent were in refugee camps in Ivory Coast, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, the rest resided in towns and villages or deep in the rain forest (Sawyer 2005, 25).

The political environment in Monrovia was more open and civil society groups started to emerge there during the war. In the rural areas, civil society groups were also more dependent on the warlords that controlled the area. Especially the priests and imams used their moral authority and pleaded for peaceful co-existence. The Inter-Faith Mediation Committee that had representation both from the Liberia Council of Churches (LCC) and the National Muslim Council of Liberia (NMCL) tried to negotiate between the warring parties. Faith-based organizations, as well as some local development organizations, were also important in relief work during the war as they distributed materials, spoke for peace, gave refuge to people, and opened schools whenever it was possible. (Mathews 2002.)

Human rights groups were formed to promote human rights education and to help victims of human rights abuses. Among these were the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC) and the Center for Law and Human Rights Education (CLHRE), which documented and exposed human rights violations and brutalities during the war (Toure 2002, 10–11). Women were also important actors for peace in Liberia. For example, the Liberia Women Initiative (LWI) raised international awareness and fought violence against women and children due to the common use of rape as a weapon in the war and the warring factions' exploitation of children as soldiers.

NAEAL maintained its contacts with AALAE and consulted them when establishing a peace education programme that contained peace messages, entertainment, and sports. They went to schools and camps of displaced persons around Monrovia with their Peace Education Extravaganza and Children's Peace

Festival, which were sponsored by UNICEF. (African Women Peace Support Group 2004, 72–73.)

In 1997, presidential elections were held and Taylor won with 75 percent of the votes (van der Kraaij 2015, 69). People chanted *"He killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I will vote for him"* expressing that they were tired of war and thought that if they gave Taylor what he wanted they could have some peace (Jaye 2009, 4). After the elections, Taylor continued to use armed bands as state security and to carry on both legal and illicit economic activities (Sawyer 2005, 30-31). Once in power, President Taylor considered the civil society as part of the opposition while international donors, who were financing the sector, were also seen as a threat to his government. Civil society activists were intimidated and arrested, and demonstrations were banned. Taylor also infiltrated civil society groups with his people.

The war intensified again in 1999. Different armed groups such as LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy), MODEL (The Movement for Democracy in Liberia) were backed by the neighbouring countries of Guinea (LURD) and Ivory Coast (MODEL), and arms both from the US and France ended up in the hands of the warring parties. Webs of family ties, friendships, old grudges, and business interests drew the whole of West Africa into the conflict. At the same time, various peace conferences were held but the agreements were broken repeatedly as there was no third-party monitoring (Sawyer 2005, 41).

Finally, Taylor was accused by the Special Court of Sierra Leone of war-related crimes in Sierra Leone and exiled to Nigeria in 2003. The Accra Peace Agreement was signed in 2003 with pressure coming from the international community as well as, for example, from the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace Movement. The country was left with destroyed infrastructure, 250,000 deaths, and more than 500,000 wounded and traumatized victims. More than 700,000 Liberians had fled abroad, and around the same number were internally displaced while the population of Monrovia had swelled to over a million people. (van der Kraaij 2015, 58.)

4.2.3 Involvement in international actors' reconstruction efforts

The war years had brought new actors to Liberia as international organizations were active in multiple fields. They delivered humanitarian aid, planned and implemented reconstruction projects, and brought in ideas on post-conflict reconciliation from other parts of the world.

In the 1980s, donor organizations had already supported local NGOs but when it came to supplying relief aid, the local NGOs were considered not to have a track record in doing relief and the assistance was directed through international NGOs.

Another factor was that local NGOs were not regarded to be impartial, since donors thought they had connections with the warring parties, and warlords had, for example, manipulated food aid given by WFP. Therefore, international NGOs deliberately distanced themselves from the local NGOs and used them merely as subcontractors. The number of INGOs increased from about four in 1989 to about

50 by 1994 while the number of local NGOs increased from 75 in 1989 to over 300 in 1999. (Mathews 2002.)

Many UN agencies and INGOs contracted local NGOs to implement their projects. The local NGOs were considered to be flexible and in a position to engage in various peace and reconciliation activities, such as giving psychosocial care or retraining of ex-combatants. They were doing trust-building exercises between conflicting parties, lobbying for peace, and organizing reconciliation events. The international agencies partly engaged with civil society to restrict any arbitrary power of the state. (Bornstein & Munro 2003, 225.)

The influx of international actors was a mixed blessing for the local civil society. As many of the local NGOs had been created for the implementation of donor-funded projects, with mixed intentions and purposes, they lacked downwards accountability and wider social goals. In addition, more established local NGOs found themselves doing any kinds of projects despite their visions and key competencies. Mathews (2002), who is the director of NARDA, one of the Liberian NGO umbrella organizations, claims that the exclusion of the local NGOs from the planning and programming of the relief aid delayed the development of the local civil society in Liberia, where the so-called relief and rehabilitation phase extended for more than twenty years.

Additionally, the international community brought in their thinking on post-conflict reconstruction and peace and reconciliation. As Macrae (2001) notes, the ideas on post-conflict reconstruction stem from the situation of a natural disaster and presume that going back to the situation before the disaster is the goal. In a violent conflict, however, the situation before also holds the seeds to the conflict. Therefore, a new order and constellation of things should be looked for instead of going back to the old order. As Fan (2013) notes, the most important dimension of "building back better" should be the transformation of political relationships.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was reached in August 2003 and to secure peace in the country the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was sent to the country with 15,000 military personnel together with 1115 civilian police officers (Bøås 2009).

As part of the peace agreement the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration (DDRR) of combatants was started with international assistance. Despite the food, money, and some educational possibilities given to them, many of the ex-combatants were unemployed after the war. Especially female ex-combatants had major challenges in reintegrating into post-war society and experienced significant trauma and stigma (Vastapuu 2018). The so-called big men networks still worked along the traditional patron–client lines in Liberia, so the former warlords were important in organizing their former combatants for economic and political purposes while at the same time guaranteeing income and other benefits for the combatants (Utas 2012; 2014).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) started its work after the DDRR process. The commission worked for three years and gathered tens of thousands of written and oral statements and organized public meetings to clarify what had happened during the war. In their report, they recommended that the responsible persons should be prosecuted for war crimes, human rights violations, and economic crimes. According to the TRC, public sanctions should be given to people who had been associated with the war factions. This meant, for example, that Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (President of Liberia 2006–2017) would not have been able to hold a public office because of her connections to Taylor's NPFL. (van der Kraaij 2015, 90–91.) No judicial action was taken. Jaye (2009) considers that this was due to the fear of undermining peace and the truth-telling process. For less severe crimes, there was a recommendation to use a traditional reconciliation and conflict resolution mechanism called the Palava Hut, where community members resolve disputes among themselves. These transitional justice initiatives did, to some extent, take place for individuals and some ethnic groups. (Jaye 2009, 29.)

As part of the reconciliation processes, the development agencies were promoting the participation of all stakeholders in the name of democracy. During the war, the power of the Poro and Sande elders had diminished in the communities, but now they were summoned to workshops to give space to the traditional authorities in an attempt to restore "a peaceful past" from before the wars and to harness the social capital of communities. According to Fuest (2010), the donors played a part in how elders and local elites were able to gain power and wealth faster than they would have otherwise done. Fuest (2010) claims this could lead to the re-emergence of a gerontocratic and hierarchical system that may be oppressive for youth and women.

An important indicator of peace and stability for the international community is holding free and democratic elections. The presidential elections were organized towards the end of 2005, and they were considered generally free and fair by the international community (Outram 2016). Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, an economist with a long career in the World Bank, won the elections. However, the governance system where power has historically been concentrated in the hands of the president was not changed before holding the elections.

The fashions of the field of development cooperation reached the local civil society as well. Liberian civil society and its organizations had suffered during the war. According to a review by McKeown and Mulbah (2007) for Search for Common Ground, a US non-profit organization, the local civil society organizations needed training in financial management and organizational development. As for organizational development, the review recommended strengthening the awareness of the roles and responsibilities of the board, the management, and the staff, to improve downward accountability mechanisms and to ensure the representativeness of the organizations.

The contents of the donor-financed capacity building, however, included the major donor fads for peace and reconciliation as well as emphasis on gender and youth and good governance (Fuest 2010) as well as participatory and socially inclusive methods. In practice, this meant that a series of workshops were organized (Fuest 2014, 53). The staff of local intermediary NGOs that had been trained in participatory facilitation methods introduced the themes to groups that included a wide range of stakeholders. As the donors' understanding of the local sociopolitical context was limited, stakeholders would include men, women, youth, and elders, and a range of groups that were considered important by the donors. According to Fuest (2010), this led to clashes between older and younger generations and genders as well as elite capture of the benefits that were made available through the capacity-building interventions.

Unintentionally, the international community ended up restoring the unlimited powers of the president and the gerontocratic traditions in the communities but left most of the implicated persons for war atrocities unpunished. At the same time there were vast amounts of donor money pouring in and everyone was trying to secure a share of it. The director of the local civil society umbrella organization, NARDA, said that "donors made beggars out of the local civil society" (Interview 12L11, 29 February 2012, Director of NARDA).

Like other local NGOs, NAEAL had survived through the civil wars and post-conflict period by struggling and by doing projects outside of the adult literacy framework, since the projects it implemented ranged from conflict resolution to agriculture.

In 1999, however, NAEAL was introduced to the REFLECT method by ActionAid. The engagement with the REFLECT methodology (Archer & Cottingham 1996) strengthened NAEAL's capacity to deliver adult literacy and laid the ground for a participatory way of working with the communities because the methodology fuses Freire's thinking on adult literacy and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques. This meant that the organization regained some of its identity as an adult literacy organization and started to influence the dynamics with the communities as the new method emphasized equal relationships between the literacy teachers and adult learners. According to Archer and Cottingham (1997), REFLECT's way of balancing literacy with empowerment seemed to bring benefits in raised self-esteem and increased participation in community action.

USAID continued to fund REFLECT through Mercy Corps that worked through local partners. NAEAL was one of those partners and its task was to train local organizations to use the REFLECT methodology for community peacebuilding programmes. The Finnish Refugee Council (FRC) got in touch with NAEAL in 2001 through ActionAid's director and started doing pilot projects in the counties of Bomi and Cape Mount. In 2002 and 2003, FRC together with NAEAL piloted adult literacy and community development programmes based on the REFLECT method.

After that, NAEAL and the Center for Justice and Peace Studies (CJPS) implemented the Community Peace Building Programme for Mercy Corps with USAID funding. They trained Mercy Corps' national partners in REFLECT. In 2006, Mercy Corps decided to discontinue their contract with CJPS but to continue with NAEAL. They had, however, one condition. They wanted Mr Bloh, who had led the CJPS team, to come to NAEAL with his team and to start implementing the programme because they thought that NAEAL was lacking capacity. Mr Bloh and his team joined NAEAL, but there were some complications with the rest of the NAEAL staff. At the closure of that programme in 2007, NAEAL went into a crisis because of a lack of funding and internal conflicts. (Interview 4N1, 24 February 2012, Executive Director of NAEAL)

As can be seen from the Mercy Corps example, there was a new master in the house. A donor would pay for the services, but it would also directly interfere with a local NGO's decisions and internal structures. The engagement with projects from various sectors had led to a loss of NAEAL's identity as an organization.

4.2.4 Restoring the mission (2008–2010)

In 2008 Mr Bloh took over as the Executive Director of NAEAL. In the following, he narrates his assessment of the situation that the organization was facing.

> When I started to review all of NAEAL's past activities something kept telling me that there was something missing. NAEAL stands for National Adult Education Association of Liberia but I didn't see an association because there was no association connected to it. An association is supposed to be made out of different organizations coming together to form an organization so that was my first observation. My second observation was that NAEAL was involved in all these different programmes and I said to myself we have to go back to our core activities as an organization and that core activity was the literacy programme. The first thing that I needed was support. Not really financial support but I needed support on forming a team that will share similar vision with me. (Interview 4N1, 24 February 2012, Executive Director of NAEAL)

Mr Bloh identified challenges related to the governance and identity of the organization. Firstly, he felt that the organization should have had affiliated members to form an association. During the years of the civil war, the organization had lost the chapters that existed in the 1970s and 1980s, and which had created a democratic base for the organization. Secondly, he saw that NAEAL had spread its functions over various fields and programmes and that it should be taken back to its core function, adult literacy.

Mr Bloh contacted NAEAL´s international partners and explained his ideas. The only one that was ready to support him was the Finnish Refugee Council (FRC). The others were too occupied with their agendas. The first challenges came from inside the organization from the Board of Directors and the staff members that feared that the institution would go down if it did not keep its doors open for a variety of projects. But Mr Bloh insisted on getting the organization more focused to become an authority in the field of adult learning. With FRC's support, a consultant was hired to lead a participatory process to draft a strategic plan. Both board and staff members, as well as partners, took part in the process, and they were able to complete a strategic plan for the period from 2008 to 2013. (Interview 4N1, 24 February 2012, Executive Director of NAEAL)

The new strategic plan restated the organization's vision of a Liberia free of illiteracy and of its people having a strong identity and self-confidence to participate in the nation's development process. This was to be achieved by promoting functional literacy, which would then sustain community development and ultimately lead to social transformation. In addition, the organization would engage in advocacy work for legislation and the respective delivery of adult education and literacy services in the country while looking for international networks to enhance its capacity. (NAEAL 2010.) The strategic plan worked as a tool so that the executive director could hold people accountable for what they had committed themselves to. In 2008, with the help of NARDA, a work plan based on the strategic plan was drafted. (Interview 4N1, 24 February 2012, Executive Director of NAEAL)

Staff and board members were, however, still hesitant about the changes made. The new focus on adult literacy had meant giving up on other programmes and donors that had not been in line with the strategic plan. This had also meant laying off staff. NAEAL had also accumulated debts and had not been able to pay salaries. However, by 2010 the organization was solvent and was implementing programmes and gaining the confidence of both donors and local partners. (Interview 4N1, 24 February 2012, Executive Director of NAEAL)

Meanwhile, a process of drafting new course materials had started in collaboration with the FRC. The aim was to produce user-friendly materials that the facilitators could use with the learners for basic literacy and arithmetic. Lesson by lesson the materials were written, tested, and re-written. For a great number of NAEAL staff, and for the executive director, the day of the launch of the material and NAEAL's national programme on literacy was the proudest moment they could recall in the organization's history.

> The proud moment was when we launch our national material. On July 8, yea, as for me, I felt personally that I had done what I was supposed to do for NAEAL. And I think if I should leave NAEAL now I don't have any regret. We have made NAEAL take its place when it comes to a literacy programme in Liberia. We have NAEAL now to be the institution that people can come to and say well you are the expert in literacy. I can sit and share the stories with Board members and say you said this thing was not going to work but it has worked. (Interview 4N1, 24 February 2012, Executive Director of NAEAL)

NAEAL started to have a track record with both the MoE and international NGOs as a serious organization when it came to managing their programme and finances, which was a boost in motivation for the whole staff. Another proud moment mentioned by NAEAL members was when they received an award from NARDA in 2010 for being the best NGO in Liberia. According to the NAEAL administrator, a long-time adult literacy champion, the strategic plan had given focus and the action plan made them work towards objectives and timelines. He also mentioned that the core of dedicated staff with their passion for the work was a source of success, as were financial transparency and the hands-on approach to all the contracts that they undertook. (Interview 14N1, 29 February 2012, Administrator of NAEAL) The members of the Board shared the same sense of proudness.

> I think NAEAL is more strategic because now we are in the production of literacy materials. First, those materials were prepared by foreigners and given to us through training and to teach. But now we preparing our own literacy materials that are rele-

> vant and target-oriented. We got literacy workers in the field. I think we need to increase our classes especially in populated areas, in places like West Point, places like New Kru town and Logan town all these areas.. we could begin to build targets in these areas that we can meet each year. (Interview 6N1, 27 February 2012, Chairman of the Board)

Regaining the organization's identity through a strategic focus on adult literacy and accompanying materials gained NAEAL more footing among the donors and put it back into a more central position within the field of adult literacy providers nationally. The reward from NARDA further strengthened the organization's field position as a national NGO.

4.2.5 Dreams for the future

The international community welcomed the election of Johnson Sirleaf as president and Liberia's relations to the US and other donors improved (Outram 2015, 683). President Johnson Sirleaf was a Harvard-trained economist with a long career in development finance. She was able to negotiate debt relief of USD 4.6 billion from the IMF and World Bank after being accepted to the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative in 2008. (van der Kraaij 2015, 99–105.)

Development aid has had a significant role in Liberia's economy and economic policies. Donors supported the government in the drafting of the poverty reduction strategies, first Lift Liberia from 2007 to 2012, and the Agenda for Transformation 2012–2017, which stressed, in addition to economic transformation, the role of peace, justice, security, and rule of law as well as governance and the strengthening of public institutions. Human development, gender equality, and child protection were also high on the agenda.

In 2008, Liberia was the most aid-dependent country in the world and the total official development assistance to Liberia was USD 858.4 million (World development indicators 2010). The largest donor was the United States government, followed by the combined contribution of UN agencies, and the World Bank. China was also among the largest donors, with an estimated USD 20 million annually, mainly in the form of tied aid. In addition to official development assistance, Liberia received significant support from private foundations, including the Soros Foundation, the William J. Clinton Foundation, and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. (World Bank 2010.)

Fungibility existed on the governmental level, as the government could continue to give tax reductions and concessions to foreign firms as the aid flows covered the tax revenue that was not being collected. Johnson Sirleaf attracted foreign investors to the country by offering concession agreements. Liberia possesses an abundance of natural resources, ranging from diamonds to iron ore, rubber, palm oil, and hardwood to oil found off the country's coast. The oil industry was a very lucrative business with high interests and the national parliament had difficulties in supervising the sector. (van der Kraaij 2015, 114-115.)

Internally, however, criticism mounted as the president appointed family members and old friends to important positions. For example, the president's sons controlled the banking, oil, and security sectors (Outram 2016, 685). At the same time, freedom of the press was under attack, as independent newspapers were closed (FontPage Africa, National Chronicle, Women voices) and their editors harassed (van der Kraaij 2015, 123).

The government used civil society when it needed their support in front of the international community, but the relationship remained marked by suspicion (Atuobi 2010). Civil society and the private sector were recognized by the government as important partners in the Agenda for Transformation (AfT) and they were engaged in the process of drafting the policy and in its monitoring and evaluation. However, the civil society representatives saw that the consultations were only demonstrative and that there was no real space to influence the government or to hold it accountable. As the civil society was scattered, the government could choose to talk to those NGOs that agreed with it (Interview 12L11, 29 February 2012, Director of NARDA).

Outside observers have pointed to the problem of coordination within civil society and the lack of clear mandates (Holmberg et al. 2013). NGOs were concentrated in Monrovia, which raised the question of representation, especially of the rural populations. The different actors competed with each other for donor funding instead of building cooperative relationships among themselves. The practical work was also hampered by deficient means of communication and limited access to information. (Holmberg et al. 2013.) As donors started switching from reconstruction to development mode, they started to support the government's capacity-building instead of civil society, which meant more competition between the civil society actors and the government for donor funding.

Restrictive legislation is a common way for governments to control the space and the actions of civil society (Popplewell 2018). The National Policy on Non-Governmental Organizations in Liberia (Government of Liberia 2008) had been written in collaboration with the Government of Liberia, donors, and civil society representatives (Interview 12L11, 29 February 2012, Director of NARDA). Towards its finalization, the process started to slow down due to changes of ministers, and parts of the policy were not implemented. The establishment of an NGO council that would establish a Code of Conduct for self-regulation of the sector and the formation of a Standing Independent Appeal Board that would mediate in conflicts between the NGOs and the government were not realized. (Interview 12L11, 29 February 2012, Director of NARDA)

At the time of my fieldwork, there were some signs that the Johnson Sirleaf administration was hardening its attitude towards the NGOs. During a LINGO fair in 2013, the vice-president addressed especially the INGOs by saying that Liberians were ready to take the driver's seat, implying that the government was ready to take up where the INGOs had left. During her State of the Nation Address of 2014, President Johnson Sirleaf accused some NGOs of challenging Liberia's national sovereignty and trying to become super-national bodies, statements which made the local civil society feel she was trying to silence the national civil society. These and other events, as well as more control over the freedom of assembly and expression (CIVICUS & National Civil Society Council of Liberia 2014) signalled that the government was taking a tighter grip on the civil society and the media.

Meanwhile NAEAL continued its work on adult literacy. In a workshop in early 2012, NAEAL (NAEAL 2012a) staff discussed their dreams concerning the organization (see Figure 2). These dreams were astonishingly similar to the aspirations in the 1980s when the organization was also striving to have chapters of literacy teachers in every corner of the country.

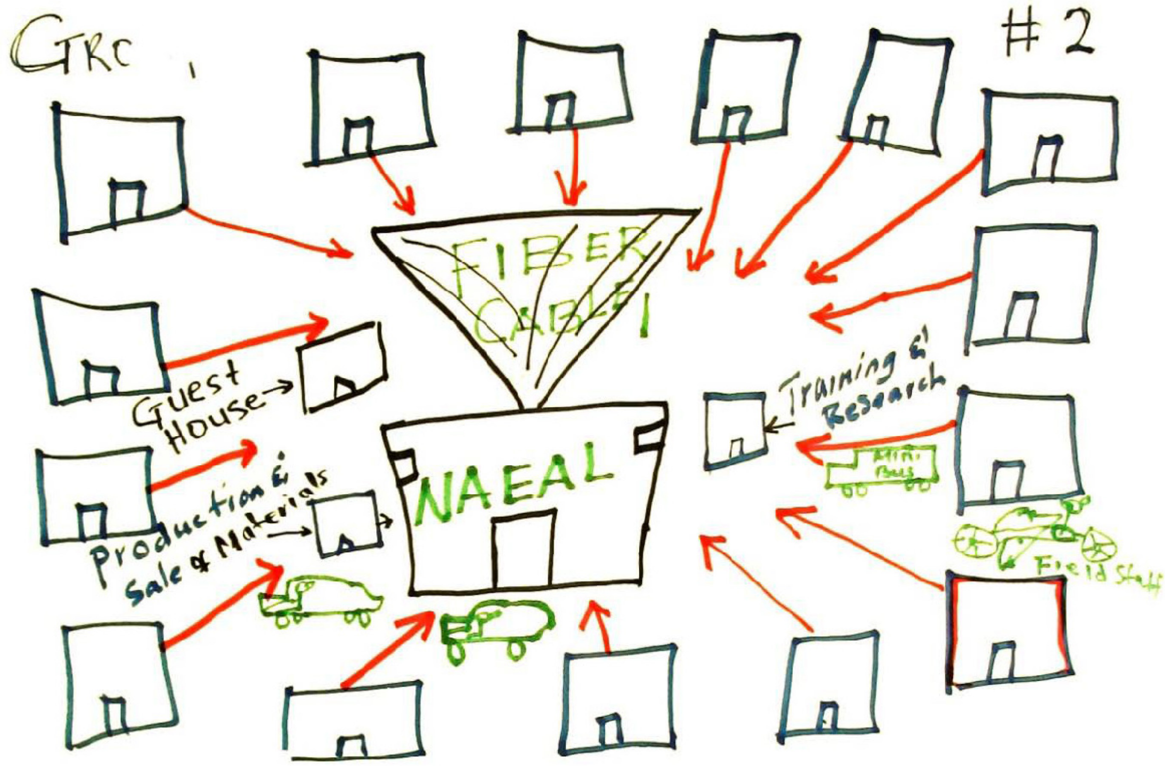

FIGURE 2 The dream – NAEAL in the future

Source: NAEAL 2012a

In an optimal situation, the staff saw that there would be a NAEAL presence in all fifteen counties, with a small literacy centre and a chapter formed by the local facilitators and Literacy Management Committees. The work would be coordinated from the headquarters, which would also host a publishing and printing facility and a training centre. The printing facility would be used for producing materials and for generating income by selling publications. The training centre and its facilities for accommodation of the participants could be rented to outsiders so that it would also earn income for NAEAL. Transportation would be available for field staff and coordinators for monitoring and support. Monitoring and communication could also be done over the internet because of the nationwide fibre-optic cable. The internet could also be used to publicize NAEAL's work both nationally and internationally. They continued to see themselves as partners of the government while at the same time doing advocacy for alternative basic education policies, so that there would be a functioning system in place to eradicate illiteracy within the next ten years.

There was a brief moment when it seemed that the transition from reconstruction to development would be possible in Liberia. The economy was growing between five to nine percent annually. Foreign private companies and investors were coming in. However, with the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in March 2014, development was pushed back significantly. The response from the national government and the World Health Organization was delayed. The disease hit the poor the hardest while the rich and foreigners had the means to leave the country. The Minister of Finance petitioned the donor community for help and said that the whole existence of the Liberian state was at stake. The fear of the disease led to international and internal isolation. In the end, the key actors were the communities themselves with the help of local organizations that had the trust of the people due to their long-term presence in the communities. NAEAL was one of the civil society actors that was active during the Ebola outbreak. They were able to transform their programmes into Ebola information campaigns and to use the cadre of trained literacy facilitators to transmit the messages to 62,000 people (Suomen Pakolaisapu 2018).

4.3 Chapter conclusions

This chapter has provided contextual information on Liberia that will be useful for understanding chapters 5 to 7, which elaborate NAEAL's relationship with its main legitimacy audiences. It has also narrated NAEAL's history in relation to the events that took place in Liberia, and, finally, it analysed their effects on some key organizational attributes.

Some of the features of the local context derive from the times before the American settlers came to what is now Liberia. Elders and secret societies governed the communities, but young warriors were respected for their ability to bring war booty. A good chief was expected to share goods with the whole community. This system of patronage was later exploited to establish governance and tax collection for the state and the president.

The history of NAEAL is tied to the political history of Liberia from its initiation in 1977 until today and its possibilities to perform its work have been conditioned by the prevailing political climate and the resources available from the national government and the international community. Government policies towards adult literacy have mainly been supportive of NAEAL's work, but it has also been mindful of the government in power and held to its role as a service provider and a pressure group for adult literacy. Part of the answer to NAEAL's survival through different governments is that adult literacy can be promoted based on various motivations, ranging from religious aspirations to enable people to read the Bible and economic as well as human growth to empowerment and social transformation. It can also be motivated by ethnic reasons when supporting learning in local languages.

The times of turbulence caused by the civil wars also meant hard times for NAEAL, while the time of reconstruction introduced the organization to development cooperation and the donor policies that have become vital for NAEAL as well as for the government. Donors became especially important, as the government was not able to provide financing for NAEAL the way it did from the 1970s until the early 1990s.

Except for the first years of reconstruction when NAEAL was engaged in a variety of projects in different sectors, the identity of the organization has been focused on providing adult literacy services and advocacy for the importance of adult literacy. Structurally, NAEAL started as sort of a literacy teachers' union, and it provided capacity-building services for its members. It was only in 1988 that it was registered as a non-governmental organization with a secretariat. However, even before that, the organization was governed by a general assembly that was formed by representatives from chapters in different counties. The chapters and the representativeness were lost during wartime and the Board of Directors became the governing body. During the 1980s, NAEAL was well connected to the international movement on adult literacy. However, it has maintained its position as a local NGO with a specialization in adult literacy.

As this chapter demonstrated, the government is an important actor when it comes to the possibilities to operate in Liberia. The next chapter identifies the legitimacy demands the Ministry of Education places on NAEAL and the actions and strategies that NAEAL has used to manage these demands.

5 WORKING FOR A READING LIBERIA WITH THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

This chapter argues that the Ministry of Education (MoE) is one of the most important legitimacy audiences for NAEAL and that the government of Liberia is an influential and powerful master for all actors within the sector of education due to its position as the sector regulator for education. The MoE also represents the government in its relationship to the other actors such as donors and non-governmental providers of education, which adds to its power. The chapter also briefly discusses other government bodies to the extent they regulate NAEAL as an NGO. The accreditation of NGOs falls under the ministries for Foreign Affairs and Planning and Economic Development, meaning that they also hold power over NAEAL as a local NGO.

As described in Chapter 4, the relationship between NAEAL and the MoE started already in the 1970s because NAEAL started as an initiative of literacy teachers that were on the MoE's payroll. For the first ten years, NAEAL received financing from the MoE. Even if the international donors have been the main source of resources for NAEAL from the 1990s onwards, the connection with MoE has continued.

According to the Education Reform Act from 2011 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011), the MoE is headed by the Minister of Education, with three deputy ministers that are in charge of the departments for administration, instruction, and planning and research. Within the department for instruction, there are five technical bureaus headed by assistant ministers for early childhood education, basic and secondary education, teacher education, science, technical, vocational and special education and for student personnel services. The division for Alternative Basic Education (ABE) falls under the bureau for basic and secondary education and is headed by a director.

The influence towards NAEAL and other actors that are engaged in adult education is channelled mainly through the division for Alternative Basic Education (ABE). As the MoE's resources for adult literacy and adult education are scarce, the MoE relies on various partners for funding and provision of services. These partners range from international organizations to local NGOs and religious and other private organizations.

This chapter draws on data that I collected during my fieldwork in Liberia from 2012 to 2013. I had the opportunity to interview the director of the Alternative Basic Education division, and attend various meetings, seminars, and trips where the representatives of the MoE were present, and observe the interaction between MoE representatives and NAEAL staff. Both donor and local government documents have also been used to establish the basic situation of adult literacy in the country.

In what follows, I first introduce the policies concerning adult literacy and adult education in Liberia. I then describe the MoE's relationship with the donors and how that influences the sector as a whole. Then I will move on to analyse NAEAL's managerial responses to the pressures of legitimacy that originate from the MoE and its ABE division in particular. The managerial responses have been divided into actions regarding the regulative, pragmatic, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures of legitimacy and to emerging strategies that are based on those actions. There is also an analysis of the historical and political context that affects NAEAL's relationship towards the MoE.

The main findings of this chapter are summarized in Table 3.

TABLE 3 Legitimacy audience: Ministry of Education

Legitimacy audience: Ministry of Education - The MoE has power in the local context as a sector regulator and representative of the government.			
Actions in response to different types of legitimacy pressures			
Regulatory	Pragmatic	Normative	Cultural-cognitive
NGO accreditation and annual reporting to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development and the Ministry of Education	Service provision and learning results in adult literacy Attempts to gather information on adult literacy service provision Advocacy for adult literacy and adult education (including media attention) Participation in drafting policies	The shared ideal of a reading Liberia Literacy NGO with a good track record Bringing resources to the adult literacy sector Staff with matching characteristics	Respecting the government in power Showing respect to the MoE personnel Involving more representatives in the board/activities Culturally appropriate ways of behaviour

Emerging managerial strategies

Conforming

- Complying with laws and regulations
- Complementing the Ministry of Education in service production

Influencing

- Influencing the MoE representatives by involving them in the governance of the organization, inviting them to events and field trips, showing examples of new approaches

Striving for independence

- Manipulating through influencing the context via advocacy, policymaking, and networking
- Buffering the organization from excessive government influence via gaining legitimacy among other audiences and receiving funding from various sources

Other

- Conforming to common ideals and local cultural-cognitive expectations

5.1 Ministry of Education as the sector regulator

During my field research in 2012 and 2013, Liberia was working to transition from being a post-conflict country to being a middle-income country. The fourteen years of conflict (1989–2003) had been followed by ten years of recovery and reconstruction (2003–2012) and Liberia was to cross the important milestone of ten years of a relatively peaceful period. For example, the World Bank considers that ten years of peace, recovery, and reconstruction are needed for a country not to relapse back into a violent conflict (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs 2013, 2). The issue of fragility was on the international agenda at the beginning of the 2010s and a "New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States" was adopted in the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in 2011 to support fragile states (International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding 2011). Liberia participated in the creation of this policy and it was piloted in Liberia together with the key donors (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs 2013, 155–156).

The New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States and the other international frameworks of the time such as the Paris Declaration and the Accra Action Plan were considered when drafting Liberia Rising 2030 Vision and the Agenda for Transformation (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs 2013, xi). The Agenda for Transformation (AfT) was the Government of Liberia's five-year development strategy for 2012 to 2017 and it operationalized the long-term vision of Liberia Rising 2030, according to which Liberia should become a middle-income country with a per capita income of USD 1000 by 2030. In these documents, the period 2012 to 2030 was envisioned to be a period of inclusive growth and wealth creation. (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs 2013, 1.)

The Agenda for Transformation followed the Lift Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy (2008-2011) that concentrated on post-conflict emergency reconstruction. This included, for example, the rehabilitation or construction of schools that had been destroyed during the wars, teacher training, and curriculum development. (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs 2013, 4–5.) Additionally, one of the mid-term goals of the Lift Liberia Poverty Reduction Strategy was the improvement in adult literacy. The PRS also considered that education played a central role in development, including improved health awareness, human resource development, awareness of human rights, and better participation in civic responsibilities, improved gender balance, and productive capacity. (Ministry of Education 2008.)

In the Agenda for Transformation, the goals for economic growth and transformation are in focus and human resources are a prerequisite for these goals. It refers to productive citizens that have the knowledge and skills needed as an important means for economic growth. To secure a base of these productive citizens, they need to have access to quality education, that is, relevant and suited for out-of-school youth and adults. Additionally, in the document, the right to education and other basic services are seen as part of social inclusion and nation-building. (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs 2013.)

The Liberian Constitution ensures educational opportunities for all and emphasizes the elimination of illiteracy (World Bank 2016, 71). The Education Reform Act of 2011 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011) prescribes the organizational structures, roles, and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education. It is the MoE's responsibility to guide the sector with policies and monitor the 2500 public schools as well as the private, mission, and community schools in the country. The Act established the structure of the Liberian education system to consist of nine years of basic education, three years of senior secondary, technical, or vocational education, and four years of university or other tertiary education. The National Education Sector Plan (2010-2020) emphasises the nine-year basic education that would be free of charge and compulsory for all children.

In 2015 there were some 2500 schools in the public sector with over 1.4 million students and 19,000 teachers. The MoE also oversees the non-governmental schools managed by private, mission, or community groups that cater to 46 percent of students. (World Bank 2016, xvi.) The MoE coordinates the activities of the sector with various governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, such as ministries, educational institutions and organizations, and donors. It also provides the overall policy coordination and oversight to the sector and manages the decentralized educational system in the fifteen counties through its County and District Offices. These offices manage the corpus of teachers and provide support for school management; they also register the non-governmental schools operating within their districts. (World Bank 2016, 129, 134.)

The Government of Liberia has made efforts to reform the education sector, which suffers from various challenges. The challenges relate especially to the quality of education, including poor learning outcomes and quality standards. Teachers have challenges in pedagogical skills, but also in getting support and supervision from school management. The immediate challenge relates to the financing of the sector. The share of government expenditure on the education sector ranged from 10 to 13 per cent between 2012 to 2016, which is low from a regional perspective. (World Bank 2016, 9.) Over fifty percent of the financing of the sector comes from donors. However, because there is no systematic mechanism in place, and a large part of donor financing is channelled directly to implementers, it is difficult to obtain an overall picture of the financial situation of the sector. (World Bank 2016, 8.)

5.1.1 Policy framework for Alternative Basic Education

The problem of adult illiteracy and lack of basic skills continued to persist despite the programmes and training in alternative basic education (Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs 2013, 88–89).

There is a large demand for education in Liberia for both the young population as well as for adult learners. The population of Liberia is young with some 40 percent of the population under 15 years of age, and 30 percent between 15 and 35 years of age. Female, poor, and rural residents are more likely to be illiterate than male, wealthy, and urban dwellers. Female literacy improved slightly from 41 per cent in 2007 to 48 per cent in 2013. However, younger women aged 15 to 19 years of age had a literacy rate of 69 percent compared to 29 per cent among the 40- to 44-year-olds. (World Bank 2016, xiii.) This is because of the effects of the civil war that persist, as 30 per cent of women of ages 15 to 35 and 13 percent of men have never been to school (World Bank 2016, 101).

The MoE is the government agency that coordinates and monitors all efforts made by various entities on alternative basic education, which is the tool to tackle the educational needs of out-of-school, over-age youth, and adults. The Policy on Alternative Basic Education was approved in 2011 after a process supported by various international and national partners, including NAEAL. The goal of the policy is to create a national system that would give a second chance to the above-mentioned groups to gain literacy, numeracy, life skills, and work readiness throughout the country (Ministry of Education 2011).

The Division for Alternative Basic Education was formed by merging the Division of Adult Education and the Accelerated Learning Unit. The new division was put in charge of the implementation of the policy with functions ranging from the coordination and oversight of all public and private services within alternative basic education to building the capacity of its personnel, to approving the curriculum and setting standards, to mobilizing funds for the implementation of the policy. The Division coordinates the work through County Education Offices, which in turn oversee the District Education Offices. (Ministry of Education 2011.) However, due to lack of resources, functions related to adult education have been almost non-existent as the central office and the offices in the counties have not had financing for their work nor, for example, means of transport to visit schools. Professional training is lacking and the offices are supposed to take care of all education-related issues, so their input for specifically adults' basic education is limited. (World Bank 2016, 131, 135.)

As the Policy on Alternative Basic Education was recent, there were two older policies in place and still functioning, namely the Accelerated Learning Program Policy and the Alternative Basic Education Policy. The two policies were implemented in practice through the ALP and ABE programmes. The Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) that started already in 1999 targeted out-of-school youth between 8 and 18 years, which is a heterogeneous group in educational background, social status or age, and gender. ALP provided the primary school curriculum to be completed in three instead of the normal six years and by 2011 it had reached 250,000 learners. The programme was able to survive the war years and helped in the reconstruction of the educational system as well as the interest in the teaching profession. (UNICEF 2011.)

However, at the same time, several reasons led to a high dropout rate and low attendance. These included economic and cultural reasons, such as working inside and outside the house, migration, and teen pregnancies; challenges with accessibility due to long distances to school or heavy rainy seasons; as well as school-related factors of large class sizes and absent teachers, or lack of school lunch programmes (Ministry of Education 2008).

The future of the programme has been unclear, because in 2009 the Ministry of Education decided to end the ALP programme and some partners stopped funding it. The UNICEF evaluation (UNICEF 2011) was, however, positive and some donors continued to fund the programme even though the enrolment rates declined because of the uncertainty surrounding the programme's future. (World Bank 2016, 101.)

The Alternative Basic Education (ABE) programme is a more recent programme that has been operating in parallel to ALP catering for people between 13 to 38 years of age and above. The programmes, therefore, overlapped for ages 13 to 18. The ABE programme provides basic education, functional literacy, numeracy, and some livelihood activities. The two programmes aim to provide out-of-school youth and adults with basic education in maths, science, English, and social studies. These programmes should give the participants the possibility to continue their studies within the formal educational system, but in practice, this transition rarely works. (World Bank 2016, 105.) The ABE programme got a boost in 2011 when the USAID-funded Advancing Youth Project started to support it with 35 million USD over five years. The project started with providing evening classes in five counties through 120 local schools. (World Bank 2016, 104.)

The provision from the state budget for alternative basic education was almost non-existent in 2012 and 2013, consisting mainly of modest salaries for the division's staff. Therefore, the division depends on various partners for the execution of its functions. The partners include large multi- and bilateral funders, INGOs and local NGOs, religious and private organizations, different foundations, and private companies. Different churches and religious organizations promote adult literacy to further their evangelical outreach. Some of the large companies provide adult literacy classes for their workers. These programmes may be provided as benefits for the employees or to upgrade their performance. Foreign companies might fulfil the obligations of their concession agreements by assisting the communities in accessing literacy education providers. Additionally, language (vernacular) associations engage in adult literacy to promote a particular language and culture. (Ministry of Education 2008.)

Because the MoE is the sector regulator when it comes to adult literacy and education in Liberia, both government and non-governmental organizations need clearance from the MoE if they wish to engage in programmes for adult or non-formal education in Liberia. This clearance should be renewed every two years. During the two years, the MoE should inspect the quality of the programmes, including their learning environment and staff skills. (Ministry of Education 2008.)

5.1.2 The relationships between the Ministry of Education and the donors

Officially the Ministry of Education has the decision-making power in issues related to education, but in practice, external donors influence both policy and practice. Drafting legislation and policies requires special expertise that was scarce in Liberia after the civil wars. Many international organizations, therefore, assisted in the formulation of policy documents and simultaneously influenced their content throughout Liberian government ministries (Carvalho & Schia 2011).

In the drafting of educational policies in developing countries, the major international influencers are usually UNESCO and the World Bank (Wickens & Sandlin 2007). UNESCO's definition of literacy has shifted from functional literacy to a sociocultural perspective that sees literacy as embedded in a specific context and that can enhance personal and social empowerment. The World Bank continues to emphasize functional literacy that is related to individual productivity and the skills needed for the labour market. Because the World Bank possesses more resources than UNESCO, and the funding for UNESCO's interventions often come from the Bank, UNESCO's role has become more about being a liaison than about executing due to these resource constraints. (Wickens & Sandlin 2007.)

In Liberia instead of the World Bank, USAID is a major donor and a lead organization within the education sector. However, the relationship between UNESCO and USAID resonated with the notions of Wickens and Sandlin (2007). The distinction between the two organizations became clear in the drafting of the education policies, as discussed in the following quote:

> But whenever UNICEF goes to that Ministry and say this thing, oh yes, when USAID goes there, oh yes. UNESCO, I tell them that we don't have that amount of money that you would desire, but we have brains, we have ideas, as to what you can do to standardize the whole thing, to make sure you have really quality stuff. But they look for

> the money, it's quite unfortunate. (Interview 18D51, 1 March 2012, UNESCO Representative)

As UNESCO did not have ample financial resources, it was also being sidelined by the government, which, according to the UNESCO representative, was more interested in attracting financing than having quality systems in place.

The Policy on Alternative Basic Education was drafted in collaboration with UNESCO-Liberia and the USAID sponsored Core Education Skills for Liberian Youth (CESLY) project, which ran from 2009 to 2011. The Technical Working Group that participated in the formulation of the policy consisted of the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labor, Alfalit International-Liberia, ActionAid-Liberia, CEP, USAID-CESLY, EGRA, FRC, GEL, Imani House, INTNL, IPC, LCLSS, LEED, LET-COM, LIBTRALO, MCSS, MIA, Mother Pattern College of Health Science, MYS, NAEAL, OSC/CEP, University of Liberia, UMC, UNESCO, WE-CARE–Critical Thinking Liberia, WE-CARE Liberia, Grassroot Ministry, EDUCARE, Concern, IBIS and LAW. (Ministry of Education 2011.) The above list gives an idea of the number and constellation of actors engaged in alternative basic education, ranging from various governmental agencies to international donor organizations to local NGOs. A coordinated effort is a good way to have everybody on the same page. However, as numerous policy processes are going on at the same time, a lot of time is required from the MoE officials as they need to attend numerous committees, networks, technical working groups, and donor-specific meetings (World Bank 2016, 136-137).

Once the policies are in place they also need to be implemented. An observation made by the evaluators of the CESLY project (USAID 2011) concerning the Policy on Alternative Basic Education was that due to capacity constraints and lack of political will, the policy might not be executed by the MoE. The same evaluation noted that the capacity of the MoE on all levels and especially in the counties and districts was weak and cautioned the Advancing Youth Program (AYP) that was to follow CESLY "not to race ahead of the Ministry of Education and create discontinuities between the AYP program and Ministry of Education plans" (USAID 2011, 3). The USAID-sponsored five-year Advancing Youth Program, which started in 2011, was supposed to start to build up the capacity of the Alternative Basic Education division of the MoE. The AYP started with an extensive exploratory phase to assess the situation. I later heard that the director of the ABE division had retired and was engaged in advocacy work for adult literacy.

The dependency on donor funding for education was substantial. According to the Liberia Education Sector Analysis, the annual financing from different partners in education was over USD 40 million during the first half of the 2010s. This was equal to or more than the MoE's annual contribution towards the sector. (World Bank 2016, 136.) The situation was even more so for adult education.

At the time of my fieldwork, the state budget barely covered the salaries of the Alternative Basic Education (ABE) division. The ABE division consisted of two rooms. In the first one, there were two officials with desks but no computers or other means to support their work. In the other room, we found the director of the department, again with no equipment. The director of the Alternative Basic Education Division, Mr Nuhann considered the main challenge of the division was training due to the low level of training among the ALP and ABE teachers. Mr Nuhann continued to explain that the donors aggravate the problem by training their teachers and facilitators even though the Ministry of Education should do that. (Interview 17M1, 1 March 2012, Ministry of Education representative)

Donors preferred to train and employ their own facilitators because they had short time spans in their projects and had to secure results quickly. Therefore, they chose to work with qualified staff that was easily transferable to project locations. This practice was not sustainable in the long run and created a cadre of people that worked for projects and were always on the lookout for new ones. It also created a double standard for qualifications and salary levels, which was demoralizing for the sector. The MoE was obviously not happy with this situation and the issue was constantly raised in meetings.

The donors created a situation that caused friction also between the MoE and the local NGOs. The MoE would have liked to see the resources provided by donors coming to the ABE division and to the teachers that were enrolled by the MoE. However, the donor interventions were executed independently, with externally hired organizations, facilitators, curricula, and teaching materials. The capacity building provided by the donors to the NGOs and their facilitators widened the existing gap in the capacities of the MoE and the NGOs, which increased the friction between them.

5.2 NAEAL's managerial actions in relation to legitimacy pressures from the Ministry of Education

In the following, I will discuss NAEAL's managerial responses towards legitimacy pressures from the Ministry of Education. The analysis is based on the idea that legitimacy is a relationship between an organization and its legitimacy audience and that it is the legitimacy audience's perception of the organization that confers legitimacy to the organization. In this section and section 5.3, I discuss different kinds of managerial responses that NAEAL engages in to gain and to maintain legitimacy from the part of the MoE and the Government of Liberia more generally.

I have divided the managerial responses into two categories. First, actions that are taken towards different types of legitimacy pressures. As described in Chapter 2, I have adopted four types of legitimacy from institutional theory and its applications: regulative, pragmatic, normative, and cultural-cognitive legitimacy. I will in turn explore each of them to see what kind of pressures they constitute in the relationship between NAEAL and the MoE and how the NGO responds to them, sometimes with active tactics and sometimes with more subtle ways of action or non-action. Secondly, in section 5.3 I move on to construct emerging strategies based on the actions that were described in section 5.2 and reflect on the underlying reasons, such as the historical and political context or organizational attributes that might induce these managerial strategies.

5.2.1 Regulatory legitimacy: national legislation on associations

In Chapter 2, regulative legitimacy demands were defined as the "degree to which an organization complies with explicit regulative processes" (Scott 1995, 42). Therefore, regulative legitimacy is about laws, rules, and regulations that an organization needs to follow. In the case of NAEAL, regulative legitimacy demands come mainly in the form of the specific requirements that are needed for the registration of a local NGO and its operation in the country. This regulatory function went beyond the MoE, because the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs (MPEA) is the government agency that is responsible for accreditation, coordination, and monitoring of NGOs and their activities in Liberia (Government of Liberia 2008). The line ministries, such as the MoE, are supposed to coordinate work within their administrative area and keep records on project focus areas and locations (Government of Liberia 2008).

The Constitution of Liberia guarantees civil and political rights and freedoms, such as freedom of speech and association, as well as protects individuals from excessive power of the state (EU 2017). The Associations Law of Liberia governs business corporations and limited liability companies as well as not-for-profit organizations. The law dates back to 1976 and it was recently amended in 2019 concerning details on business corporations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020). Both local and international NGOs that operate within the territory of Liberia fall under the Associations law. To be eligible for registration, the goals of an NGO have to be geared towards the well-being of communities and the NGO has to engage in social, educational, professional, scientific, athletic, cultural, or economic activities. An NGO has to be independent, non-profit, non-partisan, and charitable in its actions. (Government of Liberia 2008, 8.)

The Associations Law specifies different categories of civil society that, in addition to non-governmental organizations, include unincorporated associations, cooperative societies, and trade and labour unions. NGOs include development NGOs, such as NAEAL, and human rights and democracy organizations, youth and women's organizations, professional associations, and various umbrella organizations and networks. These are incorporated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and accredited by the MPEA. The Ministry of Agriculture registers cooperatives and the Ministry of Labour the trade and labour unions. Unincorporated associations that include for example community-based organizations (CBO) and neighbourhood welfare organizations are regulated by various bylaws. EU (2017) cautions that the legal framework concerning civil society organizations in Liberia is fragmented and managed by different ministries, which confuses the registration of CSOs.

The registration process for development NGOs like NAEAL has two phases. First, the organizations need to be incorporated with the Ministry for

Foreign Affairs and then accredited by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs. To be eligible to operate in Liberia, an NGO needs to have a mission statement that defines objectives, target beneficiaries, sectors where the NGO operates as well as a constitution and by-laws. In addition to this, the NGO needs to have a bank account, an office space, postal address, e-mail address, and telephone numbers as well as a signboard that is visibly exhibited. A local NGO has to have at least three full-time staff and a board of directors that is not dominated by a family group. Annual activity and financial reports need to be submitted to the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs within three months of the end of each programmatic year. The activity and financial reports that are submitted to the MPEA must contain objectives, achievements against objectives, and implementation with possible constraints, followed by lessons learned and recommendations. In addition, the report must also specify the partnerships of the organization. (Government of Liberia 2008.)

NAEAL took the above-mentioned requirements seriously and attempted to follow them to the letter. When I visited the NAEAL office, I was puzzled as they talked a lot about the signboard and the letters which had started to fade from it. After I realized that a signboard is a requirement in the NGO law, their concern made more sense. Many of the features that are often considered results of a mimetic process, such as offices, signboards, and logos on cars (Kontinen 2007), are already mentioned as coercive requirements in Liberian law. Having three full-time staff members presupposes a steady income flow to an organization and therefore this kind of requirement is not easy to fulfil in any non-governmental organization. As a result, it becomes a forceful way to limit the entry of organizations into the accreditation process.

In addition to the reporting for the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, NAEAL is also supposed to report to the MoE in its role as the regulator of the sector of education. Significant information sharing between NAEAL and the MoE took place informally as well, since the director of the ABE division was also a NAEAL Board member. I will come back to this practice in section 5.2.4 on cultural-cognitive legitimacy.

In summary, regulatory legitimacy demands manifested mainly in the form of NGO registration requirements and the annual reporting requirements of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs. The MoE was also expected to accredit and monitor NGO activities within the education sector. NAEAL complied with these requirements to be able to function as a local NGO in Liberia.

5.2.2 Pragmatic legitimacy: service provision and advocacy for adult literacy and education

A legitimacy audience's pressures or demands for pragmatic legitimacy derive from the aspirations to first obtain all of the benefits from an organization, such as its services. Secondly, pragmatic legitimacy may serve the larger interests of the legitimacy audience and influence its legitimacy. (Suchman 1995.)

In the case of the MoE the first set of benefits, come in the form of service provision that NAEAL offers in adult education and literacy. For the MoE, the more literacy circles and learners there are, the better as is having the broadest geographical coverage possible. It is also desirable to have good learning outcomes from the literacy circles. Because the MoE is obligated to keep records of the service provision in the country, NAEAL's efforts to gather information on adult literacy activities sponsored by different donors were also useful for the MoE.

The second type of pragmatic legitimacy manifests itself in the actions that promote, in this case, the importance of adult education and literacy in Liberia. Many of NAEAL's activities that fall under advocacy were also directly useful for the MoE in the promotion of the idea of a Reading Liberia, that is, the enhancement of literacy in the country. Similarly, the media attention and the events organized by NAEAL were helping the MoE in a very concrete way to push for the importance of adult education and literacy on the national agenda. NAEAL and many other actors participated in the drafting of the ABE policy, which was described in section 5.1.1. This work is also part of the promotion of the MoE's larger interests and especially the ABE division's work.

The clearest benefit for the MoE was the service provision that NAEAL offered to various communities. In 2011 and 2012, NAEAL had study circles in 13 counties, in more than 500 communities. These circles had 13,682 learners and 555 facilitators. (NAEAL 2012b.) As can be noted NAEAL had a fairly good outreach. In addition, it had the skills to run the literacy programme in a way that suited adult learners, many of whom struggled even with holding a pen. This is where NAEAL's expertise came in as they provided the basic literacy and numeracy skills that were needed in everyday situations. NAEAL's programme could also be used as a stepping-stone to the more demanding programmes, such as the Accelerated Learning and Alternative Basic Education programmes mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

The MoE is expected by the Government of Liberia to oversee and monitor the activities within the sector of education. To coordinate what happens within adult literacy in the country, the MoE would need more information on different actors and on the geographical scope of their programmes. The MoE emphasized its role in being in the driver's seat and overseeing all actors and their programmes in the country, but in reality, the interests of funding partners determined, for example, where the programmes would be operating. (World Bank 2016, 101.)

NAEAL made some efforts to assist the MoE with the collection and dissemination of the information regarding the number and locations of adult literacy circles in the country. Towards the end of 2012, NAEAL organized the first NAEAL partners' meeting, with the idea to share information and experiences between NAEAL, its partners, and the MoE (NAEAL 2012b). NAEAL, with the assistance of the Finnish Refugee Council (FRC), had started to use mobile phones to take photographs with GSP coordinates of, first, the eco-pit latrines constructed in project locations, and then of the literacy circles and their locations. The photos were used for monitoring and verifying outputs for both the organization itself and for donors as well as for the authorities.

The results of this exercise were shown to the MoE and other NAEAL partners during the partners' meeting and other donors were asked to identify their projects in the same manner to give a coherent picture of the situation of adult literacy groups in the country for all stakeholders. The participants of the first partners' meeting were very enthusiastic and committed themselves to forwarding the information of the adult literacy groups sponsored by them to NAEAL, who would then consolidate the information. After the first partners' meeting, however, the intentions of collecting information on each donors' literacy circles did not realize.

A second partners' meeting was organized a year later in 2013 to disseminate the results of the evaluation of the NAEAL and FRC partnership. The meeting took place in the NAEAL offices, which are a 90-minute drive away from the city centre. The MoE assisted the meeting, as well as the newly established US-sponsored Advancing Youth project, NAEAL, and the sponsoring donor. No other donor representatives that were invited came.

The practice of NAEAL partners' meetings was supposed to be a form of horizontal accountability and the partners' meeting would have been an easy way for the MoE to get information on who is doing what, where, and with what results. If all partners would have presented their interventions, they could have been gathered to a common database that could then have been used for future planning of new literacy circles and their geographical location. The common database would have served the needs of the MoE as well as the other actors in the sector. The MoE itself did not push for the execution of the system either, although it could have used its power over the implementers of adult literacy actions.

Another form to cater to the legitimacy pressures from the MoE was to engage in advocacy and lobby activities that improve the visibility and importance of adult literacy in the country. As the needs of the sector of education were huge, and the main attention went to organizing the nine-year basic education, all efforts that enhanced alternative or adult education were welcomed by the MoE's ABE division.

One means for achieving visibility were the activities arranged on the annual Literacy Day. NAEAL had convinced the government to recognize the International Literacy Day that had been promoted by UNESCO since 1966. The Literacy Day celebrations by NAEAL took place in various locations to commemorate the Literacy Decade (2003–2012). The Literacy Decade was a UNESCO initiative to boost the funding commitments to the Education for All (EFA) initiative. EFA had as its goal to reach free and quality primary education for all children, girls, and boys equally, and to halve adult illiteracy by 2015. (Wickens & Sandlin 2007, 285-286.) These targets were not reached but the Literacy Decade was used by NAEAL to disseminate information on the importance of adult literacy.

In practice, Literacy Day was celebrated by organizing processions with banners that bore slogans on the importance of literacy and people marching, dancing, and singing while wearing headpieces with NAEAL's name on them. I had the chance to participate in one of these processions, and it was great fun and very emotional. The preparations had started the day before with making the banners and headpieces. During the procession, many people lined the street and watched and cheered as the procession passed by. (Field diary 3 December 2013.)

Events like the Literacy Day seminars, festivities, processions, or visits of donor representatives were also easy to market to the media. The local newspapers would add a picture of the event to their story and an interview gave space to say something about the situation with illiteracy in the country and the results that had been achieved in combating it.

During the dissemination seminar of the FRC-NAEAL partnership evaluation, the theme of advocacy for literacy was touched upon. The ideas that were presented by the representative of the MoE consisted of a jamboree that would celebrate the positive results of literacy interventions. Another idea was to organize a football match as that was considered to promote togetherness. The NAEAL staff member that had taken part in a donor-sponsored advocacy training proposed the idea to play jingles on the radio. (Field diary 13 December 2013.)

Advocacy work was one of the donor fads that was very popular in 2013. The donors' way of doing advocacy is based on the premise that the right holders should pressure the duty bearers to fulfil their obligations towards the people (Cornwall & Nyamu-Musembi 2004; Kindornay et al. 2012). From the donor's point-of-view the civil society organizations should function as watch-dogs on behalf of the citizens, that is, the rights holders, and challenge the government to deliver services to their people. In this case, the MoE is the duty bearer when it comes to enhancing adult literacy in the country. NAEAL was one of the civil society organizations that were invited to many workshops and trainings on how to conduct advocacy.

In a high power distance country like Liberia, an NGO is, however, not in a position to tell a ministry what it should do. The way to go is to use soft forms of influencing – not the watchdog kind of advocacy that the donors push for (Popplewell 2018, 397). Even though the Ministry of Education does not have resources to deliver, it needs to be called the leader of the sector and the advocacy work has to be done in more subtle, local ways. Popplewell (2018) found out in Burundi that some groups were able to work on delicate issues, such as human rights and promotion of democracy, if they did not pose a challenge to the political legitimacy of the government. This seems to be the case also with the Liberian Ministry of Education. The local ways to influence and to lobby included, for example, having the MoE representative on the board of NAEAL and maintaining a cordial relationship with the MoE officials while at the same time taking part in the networks that were drafting legislation for adult education.

The opportunity to influence policies opened up when a Forum for Adult Education was formed to support the preparation and implementation of the National Policy on Education 2010–20 and the Act on Alternative Basic Education that give guidance to the education sector. The Forum was a consortium of service providers that advocated and lobbied policymakers, members of the parliament, and legislators to obtain more resources for non-formal education. The Forum also monitored and evaluated programmes, shared best practices, and developed monitoring instruments together with the MoE. (Interview 14N1, 29 February 2012, NAEAL Administrator)

In summary, the pragmatic legitimacy pressures from the Ministry of Education manifested themselves mainly in the form of knowing the extent of NAEAL's outreach in providing services in adult literacy, because the MoE itself was accountable upwards to the Government for tackling illiteracy in the country. The first way to respond to this pressure was through the actual provision of literacy circles in various parts of the country. Secondly, NAEAL presented a monitoring tool that could have served the information needs of the MoE in collecting all the literacy circles sponsored by different donors in one map. Thirdly, NAEAL engaged in various publicity activities and participated in policy processes that enhanced alternative basic education for illiterate adults and youth. These activities enhanced the position of alternative basic education within the education sector as a whole.

5.2.3 Normative legitimacy: a familiar, local literacy NGO

Normative legitimacy is related to an organization's accomplishments within societally valued practices. In addition, structural characteristics that are common to the type of organization, and for example, a leader's charisma and the traits of the personnel may enhance normative legitimacy. (Brinkerhoff 2005.)

Many of the features of normative legitimacy valued by the Ministry of Education have been built over the years of common history with NAEAL. First of all, they share the ideal of a "reading Liberia". Second, the MoE has learned to know NAEAL as a literacy NGO with a good track record in both geographical coverage and for its methods, which produce learning results. Thirdly, over its history NAEAL has been well connected to international networks and donors as well as to networks within Liberia. These connections boost its capacity and prestige, which help NAEAL in attracting funding for itself and for the adult education sector in general, which is important for the MoE as well. Finally, in its collaboration with the Ministry of Education NAEAL uses a tactic of matching personnel with similar characteristics to do the liaison with the MoE.

The basis for gaining and maintaining normative legitimacy with the MoE is their shared vision of a reading Liberia, which goes back to when NAEAL started as an association of literacy teachers that had been employed by the MoE. The vision and the close relationship have continued even as NAEAL has been transforming itself into a modern development NGO.

Another factor that relates to the idea of normative legitimacy as accomplishments in societally valued practices is the track record that NAEAL has as a service provider. To maintain its legitimacy in the eyes of the MoE, it is important that NAEAL continues to provide literacy instruction and to be a respectful partner of the MoE. In addition to running the literacy circles, NAEAL had been able to draft and print materials that were suited to illiterate adults. The participatory methodology used by NAEAL was somewhat alien to the MoE representatives but they did show interest in how "sitting in the circle" might promote learning. (Field diary 13 December 2013) The findings in the FRC-NAEAL partnership evaluation (CDRA 2013) also showed that some Literacy Management Committees had started collaborating among themselves and the MoE representatives appreciated the possibility that "a movement for literacy" might be emerging because of NAEAL's literacy activities. (Field diary 13 December 2013) Simultaneously, the NAEAL staff members were proud of the fact that the MoE acknowledged the organization's position and capacities within the sector. This came through in the "proud moment" exercise during the workshop in March 2012 when various staff members stated that the acknowledgment of the MoE made them proud. (NAEAL 2012a.)

NAEAL's ability to bring resources to the sector of adult education through donor funding was vital for the Ministry of Education's ABE division and its possibility to advance adult literacy in the country. However, the MoE would have rather seen that the resources had come directly to their own facilitators and the development of their own interventions. In many donor projects, adult literacy was part of programmes that had other components, such as water and sanitation or agriculture, and the MoE saw this as a diversion of resources from the education sector. (Field diary 13 December 2013) In practice, the donor priorities meant that NAEAL had more resources, such as cars, mopeds, staff, and facilitators, in the communities than the MoE did. I address the donor priorities in Chapter 6, which discusses NAEAL's relationship with the various donor agencies.

A final point that I wish to raise concerning normative legitimacy is the way that NAEAL handled its day-to-day interactions with the MoE. An older champion of adult literacy, who had been involved with adult literacy for decades, headed the ABE division. The ABE Division's director had also worked as a literacy facilitator in his youth and remembered those days fondly. (Interview 17M1, 1 March 2012, Director ABE division) The main point of contact from NAEAL was the administrator, who had a similar background and was of the same age. Although normative legitimacy is normally linked to the characteristics of the leader, NAEAL seemed to apply a tactic of placing staff with matching characteristics with different legitimacy audiences. In the case of the MoE, this meant matching the ABE division's director with his contemporary from NAEAL, the administrator.

In summary, normative legitimacy pressures emanating from the Ministry of Education and its ABE division were related to the fact that they see NAEAL as a familiar, local literacy NGO that they had known over a long period of time. As their motto, both organizations wanted to "bring the light" to the people in the form of literacy and this gave them a shared understanding of the aims for the practice and the relationship. For the MoE, the services provided by NAEAL were a valuable contribution in solving the problem of illiteracy in the country. Although the funding that NAEAL brought to the sector was important, the MoE would rather have seen the resources coming directly to them. This, however, was conditioned by donor priorities. Finally, NAEAL had tactically matched their seasoned staff members to liaise with the MoE to enhance the relationship.

5.2.4 Cultural-cognitive legitimacy: respecting the authorities

Cultural-cognitive legitimacy refers to the "taken-for-grantedness" of an organization within its context. This kind of organization makes sense to its legitimacy audiences and carries with it noble and acceptable social values and norms, while its activities can be understood and produce results that are acceptable and meaningful (Brinkerhoff 2005, 4).

The actions that NAEAL has taken to gain and maintain cultural-cognitive forms of legitimacy from the part of the MoE and the government in general included respecting the government in power and showing respect to government representatives and the MoE's personnel. The basis for interaction was the personal, informal, human relationships that had been evolving and which were based on trust built over a longer period of time. The relationship was further strengthened by involving MoE representatives in NAEAL activities and, for example, in its board of directors. The MoE also valued many of the culturally appropriate ways of behaviour that NAEAL demonstrated in its activities and dealings with the MoE.

Respecting the government in power is essential in Liberia despite the fact that the state could be referred to as a weak one. Liberia is a country with a high power distance culture, starting from a strong president and the big men networks that follow from there. (Utas 2008.) Historically, NAEAL has been able to operate under different governments. This has also meant that the organization has made deliberate decisions to please the government in power, as was the case of expelling members with socialist inclinations during the Doe regime in the 1980s. In the 2010s, during the era of a female president and the international hype that went with it, it was useful to emphasize the importance of female literacy.

> And particularly I think we had the good will on our side within this administration now because most of the people who are illiterate are women and we have a woman leader who is widely recognized internationally and we are using that as a rallying point. (Interview 6N1, 27 February 2012, Member of the Board)

NAEAL staff was also careful in crediting the government for providing peace and security in the country, which enabled them to go and work in the communities (NAEAL 2012a). After the hardships during the civil war, NAEAL staff saw wider importance in the state and its authorities and they were coherent in their speech and dealings with government representatives by always showing them respect.

The Ministry of Education representatives stressed their position as the sector leader. NAEAL staff reciprocated this by always being very respectful of the MoE's representatives in their behaviour and practice. In events such as the partners' meeting, the MoE representative was the first one to address the audience and was always given the best seat at the table of honorary guests.

NAEAL staff maintained respectful relationships also with the County and District Education Offices, which served as the MoE's local structures and the local authorities were informed of NAEAL's activities in their region.

Involving MoE representatives in NAEAL's governance and activities was a way to enhance cultural-cognitive legitimacy. The director of the ABE Division was a member of NAEAL's board and the connections to the Division were very active. The use of these key bridging individuals (Brass 2016, 52) was a tactic that NAEAL used to maintain close ties and to secure a flow of information that served both parties. "We keep them informed and seek advice," as they said.

The long history eases the taken-for-grantedness of NAEAL from the MoE's part. The relationships have historically been personalized, which increases the trust between the parties. There has been a MoE representative in the Board of NAEAL and, in the old days, the Minister of Education would send his /her representative to NAEAL events or take part in person.

In addition to the respectful behaviour towards the MoE people, the MoE representatives also appreciated other culturally appropriate ways of behaviour, as these behaviours were the way to conduct the activities of a local organization. For example, before starting a workshop, someone would stand up and recite a prayer and everybody regardless of their denomination would bow their head. This, as well as jamborees and processions during Literacy Day, and amicable football matches as ways to impart information on the importance of literacy, were all culturally appropriate practices that enhanced the organization's legitimacy towards the local legitimacy audiences, including the MoE.

In summary, cultural-cognitive legitimacy means that an organization acts according to the values and cultural norms that are taken for granted in its environment. In the Liberian context, this meant that NAEAL has consistently throughout its history been very respectful of the government in power. This respect has also been extended to the personnel of the MoE. Involving the MoE representative in the board of the organization and inviting MoE staff to participate in various activities was a way to further strengthen trust in the relationship between the two organizations. The MoE personnel appreciated culturally appropriate ways of behaviour, which came naturally for people from the same cultural background.

5.3 Emerging managerial strategies: complementing the efforts of the Ministry of Education

I now move on to construct NAEAL's emerging managerial strategies based on the actions that were described in section 5.2 and reflect on the underlying reasons, such as the historical and political context or organizational attributes that might induce these managerial strategies.

NAEAL uses various managerial strategies in its dealings with the MoE and the government in general. First, it shows *conforming* (Suchman 1995) behaviour because it *complies* with laws and regulations concerning non-governmental organizations and *complements* (Najam 2000) the MoE in service provision. This is enhanced by the common goals that NAEAL and the MoE have in regard to alternative basic education. They both aspire to decreasing illiteracy in the country. Secondly, NAEAL *influences* (Elbers & Arts 2011) the MoE by involving their representatives in the governance of the organization, inviting them to events and field trips, and showing examples of new approaches, such as participatory teaching methods. Thirdly, NAEAL *strives for independence* by reverting to manipulation and buffering. M*anipulation* (Oliver 1991) refers to efforts that are made to influence the context. This strategy manifests itself especially in the advocacy and policymaking efforts that have the possibility to change the way alternative basic education is appreciated and implemented in the country. *Buffering* (Elbers & Arts 2011) is used to shield the organization from excessive government influence via gaining legitimacy among other audiences and by receiving funding from various sources. Finally, within the local context, NAEAL *conforms to common ideals and cultural-cognitive expectations* that are prevalent in the country.

Conforming

NAEAL *conforms* to established standards by *complying* with laws and regulations concerning non-governmental organizations and to ideals and instrumental demands by *complementing* (Najam 2000) the MoE in service provision. *Complying* with laws and regulations is a rather understandable strategy towards the regulative legitimacy pressures emanating from the state. The registration process with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development is a prerequisite for the local as well as the international NGOs to be able to operate in Liberia. In addition to that NAEAL needs to obtain accreditation from the MoE to be able to engage in educational activities in the country. The Associations Law is quite particular about the attributes that an organization needs to have to be approved for registration. Some of these requirements, such as having a mission statement, a constitution and an independent board, are features of good practice and can be seen to enhance the accountability of organizations towards the public. However, the requirements that relate to the number of paid staff and reporting on partnerships, finances, and activities could under particular circumstances be used to restrict the civil society organizations' space for action. Reporting on partnerships could be used to support claims on foreign influence, and the various practical requirements entail financial resources that may not be available for all NGOs.

Complementing the Ministry of Education in service production (Najam 2000, 383; Ramanath 2009), or gap-filling (Popplewell 2018, 395), and bringing resources to the sector is perhaps the most important strategy employed by NAEAL in its relation to the MoE. NAEAL and the MoE shared the vision of a reading Liberia over decades, which made it easy for them to have a working relationship. The formal and informal relationships between NAEAL and the MoE that had developed over time and created trust between them eased the interaction, which assumed multiple forms. NAEAL had been showing its willingness to work collaboratively over the years, and this had made it a trusted insider that avoided open conflicts with the MoE in order not to sacrifice its possibilities to influence. The importance of collaborative relationships and avoidance of conflicts have been noted, for example, by Batley (2011) in his study of NGOs in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. According to Batley (2011), NGOs that worked within basic education, health and sanitation were able to maintain their autonomy and capacity to influence policies despite their collaboration with the government.

Due to its resource constraints, the MoE relied on NAEAL for the implementation of activities. The complementarity in service provision had practical reasons. The donors favoured the civil society actors in the form of funding; NAEAL could reach further than the government because it had even some means of transportation. It might also have better contact with the communities because many of NAEAL's staff members originated from the locality.

The engagement of various actors in the production of services has been typical for the education sector. NAEAL continued to be one of the key local NGOs in adult education and literacy and it was strong in delivering results. Its work was therefore very useful from the perspective of the MoE's ABE division. Bornstein (2005) found that the state in Zimbabwe secures legitimacy by taking credit for NGO programmes and Brass (2016) showed that NGOs' work enhances the legitimacy of the government in Kenya. According to Batley (2011, 317), giving credit to the government for the service provision was a form of cultivating relationships of trust. It could be claimed that this is also the case in Liberia, as the ABE division could show the number of literacy circles active in the country and use the outreach and results to enhance the division's legitimacy in the eyes of the MoE in general, the wider public, and the donors.

Influencing

In their study on the relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs, Elbers and Arts (2011) found that NGOs used *influencing* as a strategy to modify donor conditions. The donor organizations could be persuaded by argumentation, and by cultivating personal relationships and, for example, by taking the donor representatives to field trips and events. In the relationship between NAEAL and the MoE, trust and personal contacts were needed to be able to influence the MoE and these had been built during the long history of informal working relationships and understandings. Influencing the MoE took various forms. One way was to involve representatives of the MoE in the Board of NAEAL. The Liberian way to govern NGOs is to secure the involvement of important people in the board (Ellis 2007, 51), and there has been a movement of people and close personal connections between NAEAL and the MoE throughout its history. The blurring of boundaries between NGOs and government bodies is considered dubious by development researchers (Bornestein 2005, 67). However, in the Liberian context it is the wisest way to work, and having informal connections through a board member that is also a MoE official provides an opportunity for exchanging information and influencing policies. Hailey and Smillie (2001) suggest that balancing formality and informality can be a success factor and this seems to hold true in this particular context and culture.

Another way to influence the MoE was by involving them in NAEAL's activities and inviting them to workshops and other events and on field trips to communities to see how NAEAL's literacy circles worked in practice. At the same time, it was possible to sensitize the officials to methods and practices that were different from the traditional teacher-centred methods in use. Some of the MoE's functionaries were not aware of the methods used by NAEAL and might, for example, wonder why people need to sit in a circle to attend the literacy classes. The participatory teaching methods and the materials that considered adult learners' specific characteristics, however, delivered results that gave NAEAL credit in the eyes of the MoE. (Evaluation meeting, 13 December 2013, MoE representative)

Striving for independence

A managerial strategy that I identified and call *Striving for independence* consisted of manipulation and buffering. *Manipulating* is a strategy that Oliver (1991) presented as an effort to influence the context where an organization works. This can be made, for example, by engaging with the media to further the organization's goals or by looking for powerful allies (Oliver 1991). In the case of NAEAL, manipulation took place in the way it was influencing the national context via advocacy, policymaking, and networking. Different kinds of soft forms of advocacy and presence in the media were used to raise awareness of the importance of adult literacy. The different policy processes on alternative basic education provided an opportunity to engage and network with various stakeholders to enhance the sub-sector of alternative basic education. NAEAL's participation in the Forum of alternative basic education and other networks put it on the same level with the other members of the networks including the MoE. This was a way to reduce the power imbalances between the actors because in the professional networks there was a possibility to use knowledge and experience as a medium of exchange and, in these interactions, the participants were more equal.

NAEAL was also involved with the various civil society networks in the country. It had close relationships with the New African Research and Development Agency (NARDA), which is a consortium of various Liberian NGOs that was founded in 1987. It provides capacity building to its members that provide services in education, health, agriculture, and other social and community development. NAEAL received the Best NGO of the Year award from NARDA in 2010. This was a sign of the enhanced capacities of the organization, but also of the fact that the organization was well connected and placed within the local civil society.

Another long-time partner was Development Education Network – Liberia (DEN-L), which had trained NAEAL staff in DELTA methodology (Hope & Timmel 1984), an approach that combines Paolo Freire's work on critical awareness with different participatory forms of organizational development, social analysis, and spirituality. DEN-L has a Catholic background, which is reflected in the emphasis on spirituality in its work. For many NAEAL staff members, the DEN-L trainings had been important both professionally and in boosting their self-confidence as trainers and facilitators. These two organizations together with other local umbrella organizations gave NAEAL exposure to the local civil society and also opened channels to resources that were made available through these networks. International networks were also becoming more and more important as NAEAL was gaining access to them through its donors. Some former donors, such as ActionAid, continued their moral support to NAEAL.

In addition to the civil society platforms, NAEAL was also well connected to other influential institutions, such as churches, donors, UN organizations and, importantly, to the various communities in different parts of the country. In its relationship with the MoE, NAEAL was able to draw on this connectedness and the legitimacy that it enjoyed with these other stakeholders.

Buffering is a way of shielding an organization from a powerful legitimacy audience by, for example, diversifying funding sources (Elbers & Arts 2011). NAEAL was able to buffer the organization from excessive government influence via gaining legitimacy among other audiences, such as donors and civil society networks. This kind of buffering was needed to maintain the organization's essence as a civil society organization.

Donor funding enabled NAEAL's work and the outreach within Liberia, which enhanced NAEAL's position vis-à-vis the MoE. The donor community's involvement and resources also enabled and legitimized various forms of advocacy and policy work, which strengthened NAEAL's role and position as a civil society organization.

As was seen in Chapter 4, NAEAL has been a close ally of the Ministry of Education since its inception in 1977. The first members of the organization were literacy teachers that were employed by the MoE and it also provided subsidies for the organization's development. The dependency on the resources explains part of NAEAL's behaviour during the early days of its history, such as the expulsion of socialist aspirations during the Doe presidency in the early 1980s. However, even without the direct financial ties, NAEAL has been wary of the inclinations of different governments and has aligned its rhetoric and actions accordingly.

Various scholars (Hulme & Edwards 1996; Fowler 1997; Brinkerhoff 2002; Ramanath 2009) caution about the possibility of identity loss due to close cooperation with the government. I would argue that NAEAL's identity has been constructed in relation to the MoE. A more severe threat to its identity was experienced at the beginning of the 2000s when the organization accepted financing for various donor-driven activities, ranging from agriculture to water and sanitation to peace and reconstruction.

Conforming to common ideals and local cultural-cognitive expectations

Conforming to common ideals and local cultural-cognitive expectations is important for an organization's legitimacy in any country. To work in a culturally appropriate way is not necessarily a conscious decision or a tactic on the part of NAEAL, but more a manner of being and engaging with the local context. "There is no such thing as being non-governmental in Liberia" (Personal commentary, 10 December 2015, Utas). This comment by the eminent Liberia scholar, Mats Utas, refers to the fact that government is, and has been, very much present in the workings of the civil society throughout the history of Liberia. The wider social structures in Liberia, as in many other places as well (Lewis 2007), are formed around vertical patron-client relationships, and it is important to show respect to the people in powerful positions to be able to function in the local context. This is manifested, for example, in the way that MoE personnel is welcomed and treated in encounters. Respectively, as Rose (2011) notes in her case study of non-governmental education providers in South Asia, the recognition from the government's part strengthens the relationship between the parties. Common beliefs and values shared by NAEAL and the government helped them to align their interests, which created a basis for collaboration.

In summary, NAEAL *conformed* to established standards and instrumental demands as it *complied* with laws and regulations and *complemented* the MoE in service production. As part of its practical work, it could provide examples of pedagogical alternatives or didactical materials, and engage in advocacy work, and in this way, it *influenced* the MoE and its policies. However, NAEAL also *strived for* some degree of *independency. Manipulation* was a way to influence the national context to be more susceptive towards alternative basic education. This was made possible through the engagement in policy processes and different forms of awareness-raising and advocacy. To avoid excessive government influence, NAEAL *buffered* the organization via acquiring its funding from other sources and enjoying legitimacy among other audiences. Finally, it *conformed to common ideals and local cultural-cognitive expectations*, as this was the way to function in the context of Liberia.

5.4 Chapter conclusions

The Ministry of Education is one of the main legitimacy audiences for NAEAL because it is the sector regulator within education, and it represents the government of Liberia in this relationship. Although the MoE is lacking resources to fully execute its role as the sector regulator within adult literacy and adult education, it is still a very strong master when it comes to its relationship with NAEAL and other service providers. There is a general educational policy framework in place and programmes for alternative basic education. Lack of financial resources, however, inhibits the execution of these policies and the delivery of services, which makes the MoE reliant on donor funding.

The various legitimacy pressures from the part of the MoE, or the Government of Liberia in general, can be open as in the case of laws and regulations or more subtle as in the form of culturally accepted forms of behaviour.

The pressures for regulatory legitimacy came directly from the Law on Associations and NAEAL needed to comply with these and other state regulations. Examples of these were, for example, the multiple forms of NGO registration and the annual reporting requirements towards the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs and the MoE.

Pragmatic legitimacy pressures from the MoE manifested themselves in the queries on NAEAL's outreach of service provision. NAEAL periodically reported the numbers and locations of its literacy circles and developed a monitoring tool that could collect this information from all service providers for the MoE's use. NAEAL promoted the importance of literacy work and was active in policy work, which was also beneficial for the MoE's Alternative Basic Education division.

Normative legitimacy pressures were eased by the long and intertwined history between NAEAL and the ABE division, which enhanced NAEAL's image as a familiar and dedicated local NGO with common goals for the sector. Seasoned staff members acted as focal points for the MoE, adding to the familiarity and guaranteed culturally appropriate ways of behaviour.

I propose that several managerial strategies emerged in NAEAL's engagement with the MoE. *Conforming* (Suchman 1995) included compliance with laws and regulations and complementing the MoE's efforts in enhancing adult literacy in the country, which was their common goal. NAEAL's provision of concrete services improved the MoE's own legitimacy within the sector. *Influencing* (Elbers & Arts 2011) the MoE was done by involving their representatives in the Board of NAEAL, by providing examples of pedagogical alternatives such as participatory teaching methods, or didactical materials, and by taking the MoE staff to field trips and various events. In an attempt for *striving for independence*, NAEAL engaged in non-confrontational forms of advocacy and policymaking, which allowed it to *manipulate* the context in which both the MoE and NAEAL worked. The broader networks within the civil society, donor community, and the local communities served as a *buffer* and helped to manage the legitimacy pressures from the government. Being a local NGO that was embedded in the local cultural context meant that NAEAL *conformed to common ideals and cultural-cognitive expectations* that were important in the Liberian cultural context.

The role and influence of the international donors were already touched upon in this chapter from the perspective of the Ministry of Education. In the following chapter, I will move on to discuss the international donors as a diverse legitimacy audience for NAEAL and the various pressures for legitimacy that originate from this group, as well as the managerial actions and strategies used by NAEAL to tackle these pressures.

6 IN THE CHAINS OF AID WITH DONORS

In this chapter, I introduce donors as an important legitimacy audience for NAEAL. I suggest that donors represent the field of development cooperation for NAEAL. They function as a transmission belt for the isomorphic pressures of the field of development cooperation. These materialize in the criteria that donors use to assess the legitimacy of NAEAL. These include many regulations, professional norms, social understandings, and taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in development cooperation. However, as each donor has its unique way of interpreting the scripts of the field, variation and even confusion arise.

The relationships between NGOs and their international donors have received extensive attention in previous research. For instance, the research has continuously addressed the questions of NGO dependence on donor funding and whether that compromises NGOs' independence and ability to respond to the needs in grassroots (Hulme & Edwards 1996; Banks et al. 2015).

One of the central concepts describing donor–NGO relationships has been power. The research has drawn from, for instance, Foucauldian (Ferguson 1994; Rossi 2004), Gramscian (Girei 2016), and Lukesian (Gaventa 2006) theorizations of power. I, however, draw on the institutional ideas of power presented by Lawrence and Buchanan (2017) that differentiate between episodic and systemic forms of power. Systemic power is of special importance here because it is woven into the institutions and comes in the form of regulations and norms, but can involve taken-for-granted forms that are either hidden or invisible.

The data for this chapter draws on interviews with donor representatives and NAEAL staff, observation in workshops and seminars, and on the three monitoring and evaluation workshops that I conducted with NAEAL staff. Both NAEAL and donor documents and websites have also been consulted.

It should be noted that the period in question is a special one. Liberia was transitioning from post-conflict reconstruction to development and this affected the way the donors engaged with their local partners. In what follows, I first discuss the different donors that NAEAL was engaged in from 2012 to 2014. These twelve donors varied in size, background, and requirements for different kinds of legitimacy. NAEAL's possibilities to manoeuvre were enhanced and restricted by its organizational characteristics, which also changed in the interaction with the donors. This will become apparent in the discussion on the different managerial responses, firstly regarding those actions towards regulatory, pragmatic, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures for legitimacy, and secondly in the strategies that NAEAL engaged in to cope with the donors' pressures for legitimacy.

Table 4 presents the main findings of this chapter.

TABLE 4 Legitimacy audience: donors

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Legitimacy audience: donors

- Donors derive their power from the field of development cooperation, and it is expressed in various resources.
- Donors form a heterogeneous group with internal power struggles.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Actions in response to different types of legitimacy pressures</td></tr>
<tr><td>Regulatory</td><td>Pragmatic</td><td>Normative</td><td>Cultural-cognitive</td></tr>
<tr><td>Performance-based contracts</td><td>Implementation of projects and delivery of results

Producing monitoring and evaluation information</td><td>Characteristics of a good local NGO (outreach to communities, tools for adult literacy, willingness to engage in capacity building, and other donor fads)

The charisma of the executive director

Professionalization of staff</td><td>Use of legitimate vocabularies (development buzzwords, English)

Use of legitimate methods (workshopping)

Good reputation with other donors, increased donor trust</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Emerging managerial strategies

Conforming
- Complying with contracts
- Conforming to donor efforts to make the organization look like a local NGO

Influencing
- Influencing donors to be more sensitive to the local context

Striving for independence
- Portraying compliance and responsiveness to donor initiatives
- Buffering the organization by looking for funding from various sources

Other
- Taking care of the NAEAL family by hunting for projects and distributing benefits</td></tr>
</table>

6.1 Donors as a heterogeneous legitimacy audience

This section will provide an overview of NAEAL's donors and how they differed in size, orientation, and the length of the aid chain that each of them was attached to. Some conflicts of interest between the donors will be raised towards the end of this sub-chapter.

NAEAL had several donors that wished to enhance especially female literacy to promote social development in Liberia. However, these donors had very different backgrounds. There were large international organizations ranging from the World Bank and international NGOs as well as UN organizations to smaller European NGOs such as the Finnish Refugee Council, the German Bread for the World, Sirleaf Market Women's Fund, which was a US-Liberian fund, to the private multinational company Equatorial Palm Oil. Each donor had their own practices and procedures for contracts and for monitoring and reporting. Moreover, because the financing periods of donors were short, there was a rapid turnover of donors and projects.

From 2012 to 2014, NAEAL had contracts with 12 different donors (see Table 5), but their funding was short term. This caused a situation where NAEAL's budget fluctuated drastically. The organization's total budget in 2012 was around USD 200,000, with an increase to USD 400,000 in 2013, and then again diminishing to around USD 200,000 in 2014. To adapt to this sharp fluctuation of funding, the number of staff members varied from 35 to over 60 between 2012 and 2014.

TABLE 5 NAEAL's donors 2012–2014

Donor	Spring 2012	Autumn 2012	Autumn 2013	2014
ACDIVOCA	X			
ARC (EPAG)	X			
Bread for the World				until 2017
EPAG	X			
EPO		X		
FRC	X	X	X	until 2016
IRC (EPAG)			X	
SMWF		X	X	X
UNESCO	X	X		X
UNWOMEN			X	
USAID / PROS-PER	X	X	X	until 2016
ZOA	X	X	X	until 5/2015

Source: NAEAL 2012a; Interviews 4N1 (24 February 2012) and 31N2 (4 December 2012) with the Executive Directors

Large donors or projects that had long delivery chains were the World Bank sponsored Economic Empowerment for Adolescent Girls (EPAG) programme, USAID's People, Rules, and Organizations Supporting the Protection of Ecosystem Resources (PROSPER) project, and an integrated community development project coordinated by ZOA, a Dutch NGO. Especially these large programmes demonstrate that international development cooperation can also be an important business with large operational budgets and huge numbers of staff.

The World Bank was financing a programme called the Economic Empowerment for Adolescent Girls (EPAG), which was part of the World Bank's Global Adolescent Girls Initiative that was being implemented in various countries as different as Liberia, South Sudan, and Afghanistan. The funds for this initiative combined public donor funding with private foundation grants. In 2012, the funds for the programme in Liberia came jointly from the Government of Denmark and the Nike Foundation.

The goal of the EPAG programme was to increase the employment and income of young women. The first phase of the EPAG programme covered 2500 adolescent girls, who received training in life skills and business skills.

The Ministry of Gender and Development hosted the EPAG implementing office. The EPAG programme had contracted various intermediary organizations to implement various parts of the programme as sub-contractors and they were usually international NGOs that had their offices in Monrovia. One of these organizations, the American Refugee Council, had outsourced the training in life skills for 460 girls to NAEAL. NAEAL did also a small six-month contract directly with the EPAG office in 2012. In 2013, after a gap of over a year in implementation, the project started again and NAEAL was hired by a new sub-contractor, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), to continue the business-skills training of adolescent girls. IRC is an American non-profit with total operating revenues of around USD 700,000,000. The practice of sub-contracting meant that each implementing agency was tied to short-term contracts with strict rules and regulations, and their remuneration was based on achieving performance targets set in the contracts. The performance requirements and rules for monitoring and reporting trickled down the chain of implementers.

As the programme was in its pilot phase in 2012, the quality control and monitoring practices were substantial. The facilitators assessed and recorded the study circles learning daily and the NAEAL officers visited the locations twice a month. In addition to this, outside evaluators could pay an unannounced quality control visit and an impact evaluation was done every six months by an external group of consultants. The programme had introduced a practice of control groups, according to which a group of girls would attend the programme and another group, not attending the programme, would serve as a control group to see the difference between the groups. This method, based on the idea of randomized trials common in medicine, was gaining popularity at the beginning of the 2010s within development cooperation (de Souza Leão & Eyal 2019). An ethical issue, though, arises from the fact that some girls would get a chance to participate and others not, and the Ministry of Gender and Development insisted that the participants of the control group also be given the possibility to receive the training after six months.

There was also a connection to bilateral aid through USAID that financed a community forestry project called People, Rules, and Organizations Supporting the Protection of Ecosystem Resources (PROSPER), which was active in Nimba. NAEAL mobilized local communities as the PROSPER programme sensitized communities of their rights to land. The right to land had become a major concern as concession rights were given to foreign companies and local communities were losing the lands they had collectively owned and utilized in the past. An American consultancy company TetraTech was the implementer of this programme. TetraTech is a huge private company with over 13,000 employees all over the world. (TetraTech 2021)

ZOA coordinated another programme that had a long chain of implementation and a complicated structure. The integrated community development project in Liberia was part of a regional programme implemented together with Save the Children and CARE. ZOA was the so-called lead organization for the programme. ZOA is a Dutch NGO that works in 15 countries affected by conflicts and catastrophes. ZOA raises funds in the Netherlands from the general public and receives institutional funding from several organizations, such as the Dutch government, European Union, UN institutions, and other governments. (ZOA 2021.)

ZOA engaged in longer-term contracts, mainly three years. Because it was going to leave Liberia by mid-2015, it had added a component to support its partners' organizational development and advocacy skills. NAEAL was one of ZOA's seven partners and its role was to support other organizations in implementing the literacy component of the programme. As can be seen from the quote below, ZOA considered NAEAL a strong local partner, and they acknowledged they could learn from NAEAL's expertise. ZOA also relied mainly on NAEAL's own monitoring practices of the study circles, as the programme's own highly aggregated M&E system did not accommodate much local-level data.

> I think NAEAL is … one of the strongest partners we work with, they have a different position. Because they are actually monitoring one of our partners SHIFT, you know. SHIFT is implementing the other literacy program for us and we work together with NAEAL to monitor their performance and the progress that they are making in the field. So for us and NAEAL is more than like, an equal partner, so it will be difficult like when you are talking about funding and donor, how equal are you, but they are but we see them more like equal partners so it's not that we so… Some of the other partners have weaker capacity and we also would like to learn from NAEAL on adult literacy and we know they are expert on this. (Interview 29D32, 27 November 2012, Donor representative)

UN organizations like UNESCO and UNWOMEN supported NAEAL to organize literacy circles directly or through other organizations. In comparison to other institutional donors, these UN organizations' budgets were modest. The funding for the UN organizations comes mainly from the member states and other institutional donors. This means they are also tied to the back-donor requirements and transmit the same problems of project-based support of short timelines, efficiency, and excessive measurement requirements. (Wickens & Sandlin 2007.)

UNWOMEN financed the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund of Liberia (SMWF), which contracted NAEAL to organize literacy circles to market women. The SMWF, which later became the Sustainable Market Women's Fund, is a fund established in 2007. In addition to institutional funding, it raises funds in the US mainly from sororities. The first contacts with sororities were established with the help of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Her grandmother was a market woman and because of this, she felt strongly about the SMWF's cause. SMWF is improving the infrastructure of local marketplaces, provides micro-credit for market women, and supports training in adult literacy and entrepreneurship. (SMWF 2012.) Market women are important in Liberia's economy because most Liberian women work in the informal sector. Market women were also instrumental during the Civil War in getting foodstuffs across enemy lines, and later, in combating the Ebola crisis.

There were also a couple of organizations that had shorter aid chains attached to them. The Finnish Refugee Council and Bread for the World received financing from the governments of Finland and Germany, respectively.

NAEAL's most long-standing partner was the Finnish Refugee Council (FRC), which had worked with NAEAL since 2002. FRC received its funding from the Government of Finland. The Finnish organization is small compared to the other donors and implementers. FRC's budget for development cooperation was approximately EUR 3 million in 2015, and it had projects in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Myanmar, and Thailand. It also engages in communication on refugee issues in Finland. FRC's annual contributions to NAEAL ranged from EUR 46,000 to EUR 32,000 between 2012 and 2014. (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland 2016.) With the help of FRC, NAEAL developed its literacy programme and the related teaching materials. FRC differed from NAEAL's other partners in its long-time engagement and hands-on style of working with NAEAL. They also tried to consider NAEAL's organizational needs when developing, for example, their monitoring requirements.

One of the more recent connections for NAEAL was Bread for the World – Protestant Development Service, the development and relief agency of the Protestant Churches in Germany. Their funding comes from donations and church collections, church funds, and German state funding. They had EUR 255 million for development work in 2015. (Bread for the World 2021.) Bread for the World sent a curriculum expert to Liberia at the beginning of 2014 to support NAEAL in curriculum development for four years and included NAEAL in their network for other capacity-building efforts as well.

The first private sector contract for NAEAL was with Equatorial Palm Oil (EPO), a private company that has palm oil plantations in Liberia. As a part of the concession agreements with the Liberian government, EPO is obligated to do community development in the locations where it operates. As part of this scheme, NAEAL had a contract in 2012 to organize adult literacy circles in the communities. A special aspect of this contract was that NAEAL received an overhead payment that had no strings attached regarding how it should be used. At the time of my fieldwork in spring 2012, the expectations were high that collaboration with the private sector could be an important opportunity to accumulate funds for the organization's own activities.

EPO brought in one of the conflicts of interest between donors because of the differing goals of the USAID-funded PROSPER programme and EPO. PROSPER was helping the communities to defend their rights to land and EPO was a private company that utilized palm oil plantations as a monoculture to further its commercial interests. Some of NAEAL's staff members understood this conflict of interests from the point of the communities and felt strongly for the rights of the people to the land (see e.g. Gilfoy 2015), but it did not hinder the organization from collaborating with EPO.

The EPO programme also created a challenge to NAEAL because of the lack of commitment from EPO in the learning results in the communities. EPO had commissioned NAEAL to provide adult literacy classes for the communities in Sinoe County where the company was operating. Usually, the communities would select the facilitators and the learners among themselves, but in this case, the company chose all individuals to be involved in the literacy training. The company provided the facilities for the study circles, but they were far away from people's homes. Thus, they had difficulties reaching the location in the evenings due to darkness and family obligations.

The company needed to fulfil the letter of the legislation, while NAEAL aimed to ensure that the learners actually learn to read. NAEAL saw as its moral obligation towards the communities that it would provide a proper service and therefore the executive director spent extensive amounts of time trying to contact the company representative to discuss the matters that hindered participants' learning. However, she failed to set up a meeting with the representative. Another motivation was to maintain NAEAL's reputation as a good quality provider of adult literacy. The executive director described the situation like this:

> I think they are just using the literacy to cover up that they are doing something for the Liberians. I think we need to push a little bit harder. Push the EPO so that we get, we produce what we are supposed to produce and the people in return get the benefit of the literacy component. Not just we having the literacy component and after that no impact on the lives of the people. (Interview 31N2, 4 December 2012, NAEAL Executive Director)

Due to the historical closeness of Liberia and the United States, USAID was prominent as a donor in the country. Within the educational sector, there was tension between UNESCO and USAID over the position of the lead donor. As was already referred to in Chapter 5, UNESCO and USAID were both involved in the policymaking and implementation of programmes. Due to financial constraints, UNESCO was falling behind, which aroused bitterness towards the Ministry of Education, who was inclined to listen to the money.

> Well I tell you the same thing I tell them. The USAID through one of his subsidiaries, right called CESLY, stand for Core something for youth or literacy for youth, they went and made some booklets and this thing and that thing and whatever, and they went to the Ministry and push the Ministry and say this are the main document we have to look at, all the other document are supplementary. (Interview 18D51, UNESCO representative, 1 March 2012)

Bringing in the donor's own learning materials seemed to be related to the donors' way of looking after their own interests. During the Partners' meetings in November 2012 (NAEAL 2012b), it became clear the donors did not know of each other's programmes and were not particularly interested in coordinating their efforts. In the same vein, the donors did not support the idea of having unified bookkeeping or an M&E system that would be based on NAEAL's own organizational needs. They were mainly interested in having their own projects producing measurable outputs and results. The donors themselves have double roles (Alexius & Vähämäki 2020) as they are accountable to their back donors. Their position within the aid chains that criss-cross the field of development cooperation defines the space they have to manoeuvre.

Although the donors represented the same field of international development, each donor posed particular legitimacy pressures when it came to accountability for funds and results. For a local partner like NAEAL, this created a difficult situation with multiple expectations for legitimacy. What this meant in practice is the theme of the following section.

6.2 NAEAL' managerial actions towards legitimacy pressures from the donors

In what follows I discuss NAEAL's managerial responses towards legitimacy pressures deriving from the various donors. Donors are an influential legitimacy audience for NAEAL due to the various resources that they possess and their perception of NAEAL's legitimacy as an organization and an actor within the field of development cooperation matters.

First, I discuss the managerial actions used by NAEAL to satisfy the regulative, pragmatic, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures of legitimacy (Deephouse et al. 2017, 39; Brinkerhoff 2005) posed by donors, and second, I analyse how these actions turned into strategies that NAEAL used to manage legitimacy towards the various donor conditions.

6.2.1 Regulatory legitimacy: binding contracts with performance requirements

Regulatory forms of legitimacy demands and pressures refer to rules and regulations that an organization needs to comply with; otherwise, sanctions will follow (Scott 1995, 42). Various legal requirements concerning governance structures or practices are also included within the regulatory type of legitimacy.

Application and setting of standards and their monitoring is a typical feature of regulatory legitimacy (Deephouse et al. 2017, 44).

As was described in section 6.1, NAEAL's donors were part of the long chains of aid that start from taxpayers in the North. The resources then flow through national ministries for foreign affairs to international organizations, such such as the World Bank or the UN organizations, or an international NGO, or perhaps to a Finnish or a German NGO, that then contracts other international or local intermediaries to deliver the projects in Liberia. Because of the length of the aid chain, almost every organization has a so-called back donor, that is, an agency that provides resources that come with specific rules and regulations that need to be adhered to.

As a local NGO, NAEAL was placed at the bottom of this aid chain. In its relation to the various donor agencies, NAEAL needed to sign contracts that stipulated the different services that NAEAL was supposed to deliver. Usually, these contracts were very precise on the performance criteria that was expected from NAEAL. These included explicit targets and various control mechanisms introduced by the donor. These service contracts followed the requirements that the donor had from its back donor that provided the resources for the intervention. The donor's financial compensation was usually also linked to performance measures, so these were directly applied to NAEAL as well. This meant that if NAEAL delivered only 90 per cent of the contract it received only 90 per cent of the compensation.

Each of the donor agencies was tied to programmes that came from their headquarters. Some, such as the World Bank's EPAG programme or ZOA's intervention, were part of multi-country programmes that had a similar intervention logic in each of the countries of operation. However, even the smaller donors, such as the Finnish Refugee Council, were part of organizational trends that were geared towards programming at the organizational level, not the local one. With these tendencies came programmes, contracts, and templates designed within each international organization and that had little room for adjustment to the local context.

The contracts varied as to their size, duration, and monitoring requirements. In the case of NAEAL, the contracts varied from three months to three years. The duration of the contracts was determined by the back donor's policies and plans. In return for the resources, an audit trail needed to be in place to show how the resources had been spent accompanied by narrative reporting that showed the results that had been accomplished with that particular amount of money. Thus, the provision of information became a central part of these contractual relationships. This provision was carried out based on various requirements and mechanisms of monitoring and evaluation. I will come back to these as part of the pragmatic legitimacy requirements in section 6.2.2.

Large international donors, such as the World Bank and USAID, contracted their programmes to professional INGOs or large international companies that, in their turn, contracted local organizations to implement the programmes. In some programmes, like the Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (EPAG), which was hosted by the local Ministry of Gender and Development, the implementation was split into smaller components that were then contracted to several local NGOs.

NAEAL received funding from the World Bank-financed EPAG programme through three different channels: the American Refugee Council, the International Rescue Committee – another US-based INGO – as well as directly from the EPAG office. The representative of one of these international NGOs explained to me how the payments were linked to performance.

> Ok, for this particular project that NAEAL is implementing, we have three key indicators, that are like requirements for NAEAL's implementation. We gave them like I said 235 girls. The first requirement was like make sure you sustain at least 75% of the 235. Then the second requirement after training at least 75, also place at least 75 into sustainable businesses that's the second requirement. Then the third one is like those placed in businesses should, be able to keep a track record of their business activities so it has to do with record keeping. So payment is like attached to these indicators because the project is a performance-based project.
>
> We have certain amount withheld by the Ministry of Gender, if we don't meet up with these requirements, meaning we will be able to get 100% of our payment. So we work, use our own money, report to them, before they fund. So that's the same thing we do to NAEAL to, so they work, submit report, we look at the report and bill them according to what they have done. (Interview 19D61, 2 March 2012, Donor representative)

As can be seen from the above quote, each donor had tied its payments to the delivery of very specific results. The results were followed up by targets that had been set for the project. These could be, for example, how many percent of the participants had learned to read, how many percent of them had stayed on the programme, and how many of them had been able to find a job. If the set targets were not met, the implementing organizations would receive less payment. Especially the intermediary organizations valued NAEAL's capacity to execute the projects since their own payments were tied to the results on the ground.

Performance-based contracts were a way to incentivize the different organizations within the aid chain. At the same time they provided a tool to diminish the risks related to performance failure and transferred the risk to the next level of implementers. As I see it, at the end, the risk was transferred to NAEAL staff members that were unemployed between contracts or did not have their pension fees covered due to lack of funds.

As the risks move down the aid chain, everyone wants to own the results and the success stories, but no one wants to admit failure.[5] In fragile contexts, such as Liberia, this is rather problematic, as the local NGOs have only limited possibilities to influence or prepare themselves for changes in the context. Part of the problem was handed over to CBOs, as the local NGOs, including NAEAL hired smaller community-based organizations to implement parts of the

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[5] Failure in development cooperation has usually been framed for example as a challenge or a lesson learned, rather than embraced. Recently some organizations have tried to revert this by organizing Fail Festivals to advertise that failing can produce learning and innovation. See Fail Festival 2021.

interventions. A memorandum of understanding, or MoU, is signed between them and the targets are rolled down to the smaller organizations.

To sum it up, the pressures for regulative legitimacy flowed from the donors to NAEAL mainly in the form of binding service contracts. In the long aid chains, different actors wanted to protect themselves from risk, therefore the resources and the results were followed up on carefully and performance-based payment schemes were adopted.

6.2.2 Pragmatic legitimacy: efficient implementation of donor projects

Pragmatic legitimacy is related to the tangible benefits that an organization provides for its legitimacy audiences. It may also serve the legitimacy audiences' broader needs through the adoption of their standards of performance and by showing responsiveness to their interests. (Suchman 1995, 578-579.)

NAEAL brought instrumental value to the donors in fulfilling their need in having a reliable local implementer for their programmes. NAEAL also assisted donors in collecting monitoring and evaluation information that was needed for the donors' own legitimacy towards their back-donors.

As was discussed in Chapter 4, local Liberian NGOs were used as implementers during the reconstruction period, and this was also evident in the case of NAEAL. Only a few local NGOs could deliver adult literacy programmes, which meant that NAEAL had a niche for its services. Donors considered that NAEAL was delivering the outputs and results and doing the things expected from a local implementer. NAEAL was able to secure extensions to contracts and some new ones after it had been successful with prior projects. The organization was also famous for its contacts with the grassroots and mobilization skills in the communities. A mapping of NAEAL's activities in 2011 and 2012 showed that the organization was active in 13 of the 15 counties of Liberia and it reached 500 communities with some 14,000 learners. (NAEAL 2012b.)

During interviews the donors commented that, for example, NAEAL delivered good quality, used participatory methods, and had good learner–facilitator interaction. Especially the organizations that were intermediaries themselves, valued NAEAL's capacity to execute the projects as the donors were tied to the results on the ground. The results were followed up by targets that had been set to the project in the original project documents that had usually been drafted without consultation with NAEAL or the communities.

In longer contracts or in situations where it was possible to have a continuation to a contract, shared learning and joint planning and implementation were possible. Although NAEAL brought value-added to the implementation of the projects, the possibilities to deepen the collaboration were hindered by the requirements of the back donors. For example, if a donor decided to change its geographical focus even partners that had done a good job were left behind. This also happened to NAEAL in the EPAG project. The financing for the project came from the Nike Foundation, which decided to prioritize its focus countries and withdraw from Liberia. The project was able to secure a new back donor, but this transition took over a year and the activities were put on hold during that time. Meanwhile, NAEAL staff was allocated to other projects or were “waiting small, small”, that is, were between jobs.

In addition to NAEAL’s outreach to the communities and its mobilization skills, it could draw from what they called the national adult literacy programme. The programme included options for different implementation strategies and materials and methods for both facilitators and learners. (NAEAL no date.) The first option was that NAEAL could implement the literacy programme that included the identification and mobilization of communities, organizing and conducting facilitator trainings as well as support to the study circle and the respective Literacy Management Committee (LMC) all through the nine-month study period. During the first three months, the NAEAL field coordinator would make weekly visits to monitor and to provide training and support to the LMC and the facilitator and then monthly visits during the rest of the programme period. The second option was that a local community-based organization (CBO) could combine the literacy training to a programme that had funding for other activities, such as agriculture or water and sanitation. Then NAEAL would train the CBO to conduct monitoring activities and the CBO would be part of organizing facilitator trainings and other logistics. A third variable was for the CBO to manage the literacy programme independently after NAEAL had trained the facilitators and CBO’s own monitors. The fourth option consisted of providing facilitator training and facilitator’s manuals and learner’s workbooks for a third organization that would then implement the programme independently.

The manuals, or “the Books”, had been designed to help illiterate people to start learning basic reading and writing skills. The focus of facilitator training was on delivering the contents in a way that was respectful of the learners and helped them to engage with each other and to use their skills. In comparison, some other programmes that had been rolled down by the MoE with the support from USAID had had unrealistic expectations of the level of the students, had used rather traditional teaching methods, and had failed to deliver learning results.

A study by Grear et al. (2018) looked into the learning results in NAEAL’s study circles in Jorquelleh District in Bong County. It compared 55 female learners and 55 non-participants and found that the learners in NAEAL study circles had better results in basic reading, writing, and numeracy skills. The study circle participants also acquired skills in health and sanitation at a comparably better level than non-participants did. During a nine-month course, however, the learning was limited to mainly reading and writing individual words, not sentences. For adults that had no prior exposure to schooling nine months turned out to be a short time to acquire literacy skills.

The donors’ monitoring and evaluation activities were not that concerned with the actual learning results and projects did not test for learning. Instead, monitoring was mainly concerned with the numbers of study circles, participants and their attendance rates. Evaluations usually disregarded the learning results and went straight to assumptions on women’s empowerment, peace, and reconciliation, or economic and other benefits for the participants. Theory of Change, which is a common planning tool within development cooperation, assumes that means, or inputs, lead to a chain of results that consist of outputs, outcomes, and impacts (OECD 2012). Similarly in their Theories of Change, NAEAL's donors were mainly concerned with output and impact levels and missing the middle part of the results chain. This is unfortunate, because "the missing middle" would be the key to knowing if the intervention logic works.

Although donors are encouraged to harmonize their practices (OECD 2005) and ease the burden of local actors when it comes to monitoring and reporting, this is still not a reality within development cooperation. The harmonization of practices, in contrast, tends to take place within the donor organizations. This international harmonization translates into guidelines and indicators that are the same for projects the organization supports in different countries, and for several local actors. This is illustrated in a quote from an M&E specialist that was in charge of a multi-country programme.

> We have got an M&E system that was designed on an international level which is not the most helpful system. So for this particular programme it's a very complicated system with integrated indicators that are not too much context specific because they are also used in Uganda and in South Sudan and so you can imagine that it is quite complicated but they want something to add to the targets. It's not really ideal but… (Interview 29D32, 27 November 2012, Donor representative)

In a multi-country programme, the information was aggregated for the back donor, who wanted an overall picture of the results of the whole programme. Donors, especially the people in the headquarters, wanted impact information on the projects they financed, that is, they wanted to know what sort of permanent changes had taken place in the learners' lives due to the literacy course they had financed. The information the donors wanted was highly abstracted because they needed information for their back donors and the information passed to them was a collation of data gathered from several projects in various countries.

Most of the donors also engaged themselves directly in monitoring and evaluation through their own, mainly expatriate Monrovia-based personnel or outside evaluators. The donors had substantial costs that were related to monitoring. All six foreign donors (situation in spring 2012) had specialized M&E personnel in Liberia that made field visits, designed new monitoring systems, and trained NAEAL staff on how to use these systems. Additionally, they wrote reports to their respective back donors in the North. In many cases, the larger monitoring and evaluation efforts had been outsourced to local consultancy companies. Surprisingly, in four projects out of six the quality control and biannual impact assessments had been assigned to the same Liberian consultancy company. Foreign consultants were hired for larger evaluations and baseline studies. The use of foreign and outside consultants was justified by claims on the objectivity and quality of evaluations.

To obtain the impact information for the headquarters, evaluators probed the community members on how the women's behaviour had changed since they started to attend the literacy circle. To acquire a broader picture, or to know about the impacts of the programme, evaluators interviewed different stakeholders and asked about what the learners had learned, and how the learners' attitudes and behaviours had changed. As LMC members, family members, spouses, and people not participating in the study circles had the opportunity to share their views, the learners became the object of interest for everybody.

All actors that I interviewed considered monitoring and evaluation to be important. However, it seems that the motivation for M&E was not learning nor controlling the local contractors but maintaining the local donor office's relationship towards its back donor in the North. The power relation between the back donor and the field donor seemed to stipulate the strength of the pressure that came down to the local implementers.

These findings are consistent with other studies that have been made on monitoring and evaluation of development cooperation (for example Ashman 2001; Ebrahim 2003; Wallace et al. 2006), which have noticed the tendency towards upwards accountability within the aid system. For example, Ashman (2001) notes that although International NGOs espouse partnership principles in their relationship with Southern NGOs, the internal financial and management systems of International NGOs are regulatory. They are introduced as conditions of contract and usually originate from the back-donor requirements and therefore open the door for upward accountability.

Ebrahim (2003) argues that there is an interdependency between the donors and the local NGOs. The case of NAEAL confirms this claim as well as the notion of the 'squeezed middle' especially in the case of the local donor offices. The donor representatives in Monrovia understood the absurdities of their organization's M&E practices, but they were not in a position to make changes to these requirements. Instead, they did their utmost to help NAEAL and other local implementers to conform with all the information requirements they needed for reporting to their headquarters.

In sum, donor pressures for pragmatic legitimacy manifested themselves especially in the efficient implementation of projects. NAEAL was able to use its skills in community outreach and its national adult literacy programme and materials for this. In addition to implementation, donors' demands for legitimacy were channelled through monitoring, reporting, and evaluation practices to NAEAL. It had to fulfil donor requirements for accountability and for legitimacy to safeguard the flow of financial resources. Respectively, donors received monitoring and evaluation information and a positive reputation in return for their financial inputs. These helped the donors to maintain their own legitimacy towards their reference groups.

6.2.3 Normative legitimacy: a professional local NGO with a charismatic leader

Normative legitimacy refers to societally valued practices and typical structural characteristics of an organization. For development cooperation to function, local NGOs are needed to implement the donor-financed projects. This creates a need for suitable local NGOs that would be right for the job. This includes outputs, procedures, and techniques that are valued within development cooperation and structural characteristics that are related to the category of a local NGO. In addition to these, the reputation and charisma of the leadership and staff are supportive of normative judgement criteria. (Brinkerhoff 2005, 3.)

NAEAL possessed many characteristics of a good local NGO. Due to its national adult literacy programme and the learning materials that accompanied the programme it had the professionalism and capacity to enhance adult literacy in various parts of the country. In addition, NAEAL was able to produce the required narrative and financial reports. It was also compliant with the various capacity-building initiatives the donors offered to mould the local NGOs so that they would fit the international field of development cooperation. A charismatic and well-connected leader and professional staff added to NAEAL's normative legitimacy within the donor community.

In the post-conflict situation in Liberia, there existed a "market" for adult literacy because of the high illiteracy rate. The literature has identified the phenomenon of brokerage, which refers to the role of local NGOs as brokers between donors and local communities, because donors need a local NGO with suitable characteristics to deliver the services in the various communities (Bierschenk et al. 2002; Lewis & Mosse 2006). For its donors, NAEAL was a much-needed broker between the donors and the communities as NAEAL had a good outreach within the country. Other factors that favoured NAEAL was its political and religious non-alignment, as can be seen from the following quote by a local donor representative.

> I think NAEAL is up to it. I refuse to take the other because when we started the literacy programme, when I got here we started the literacy programme in 2009, I made the literacy institutions in Liberia to submit to me their proposal, their profile and everything else, and when I send them my headquarter asked me you are on the ground, what will you choose? I said I would choose NAEAL, and they are so flexible, and they are good to work with. They are not into this political thing other literacy programme want to.. They go where the need is heaviest. (Interview 18D51, 1 March 2012, Donor representative)

This donor representative was also referring to the fact that NAEAL's management was reachable and always ready to discuss and flexible with changes in the programmes.

An important feature that contributed to NAEAL's normative legitimacy was the charisma of the executive director.

> What I really appreciate was when I spoke to (ED) I mean he had a great vision on what to do and he was not really coming up with a wish list. He was monitoring whether their separate people in the organization were taking up the action points. So I really admired how he was doing those or picking up those things. He was a few steps ahead yea and so yea.. (Interview 29D32, 27 December 2012, Donor representative)

Taking care of the relationships with donors, authorities, other civil society actors, and communities is part of the professionalism and expertise of a local NGO's leaders and staff (Lewis 2007, 164). Donors tend to engage with a few local informants that are critical and knowledgeable of the political scene of the country. The executive director created these links between NAEAL and the donors. He was the one to have direct contacts with the donors, meeting them and discussing the reports as well as the overall political situation in Liberia. The executive director was intelligent and locally well connected, which added to his perceived legitimacy within the donor community.

After the passing of the executive director in the autumn of 2012, a junior professional took over the position and she was not aware of all the donor expectations related to communication practices. The charisma of the previous executive director, however, was replaced by compliance. The donors started to appreciate the availability and attention that the new executive director gave to donor requirements.

During the interviews, various donor representatives described NAEAL as a national adult literacy organization that had the required ideas, capacity, curriculum, and materials to do the work and that it was professional in its work. With professional work, the donors referred to both delivering the various products that were needed in project management, such as monitoring data and reports, but also to NAEAL's professionalism within adult education and literacy.

As can be recalled from Chapter 4, NAEAL had been developing as an organization and as an expert in adult literacy throughout its history. Already in the 1980s, it had identified the poor capacity of the literacy teachers as an obstacle to its development and it received support from various donors to arrange national workshops for the chapters to improve their performance. A training team was established and capacitated to be trainers of trainers. (NAEAL 1984.) The training was given by a Kenyan expert, which illustrates that foreign influences were present already in the 1980s. However, there was an overall idea of developing the whole organization so that it would be better equipped to fulfil its mission.

The emancipatory aspirations of these capacity development activities were present in a speech that Dr Kwiakeh Emily Subah from the University of Liberia gave at the National Training Workshop for providers of adult education and literacy in 1988. According to Subah, the practical dissemination should be conducted in the real environment where people live. The first step was to establish a favourable climate for learning where people feel comfortable, respected, and trusted. Subah said that adult learners should be taken as co-inquirers together with the instructors and that the instructors should not be imposing or coercing themselves on the learners but to work as facilitators respecting the rich experiences that the adult learner possesses. The programme itself should change people's outlook on their difficulties and produce changed patterns of behaviour. (NAEAL 1988.)

The points that Dr Subah made have a remarkable resemblance to Paulo Freire's (Freire & Ramos 1972) pedagogical thinking. Freire resisted what he called the banking method of education in which the learners memorized the knowledge deposited in their heads without reflection. Instead, according to Freire, the learners should take an active role in their learning and be assisted by a facilitator that had gone through a process of self-reflection on their own educational practice. The learning took place in study circles that provided a democratic space for learning and reflection that would lead to a new consciousness of the people of their lives and the power structures that caused their oppressed position. (Freire & Ramos 1972.)

NAEAL's engagement with the Freirean thinking was boosted in 1999 when it was introduced to the REFLECT method (Archer & Cottingham 1996) by ActionAid. REFLECT is a fusion of Freire's theoretical framework and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). Within REFLECT, literacy circles are used for learning literacy and to reflect the participants' everyday circumstances. Participatory methods ranging from drama and storytelling to drawing calendars, maps, rivers, and trees are used for reflection and learning and to empower the participants. The method is considered an effective tool for learning practical skills in health and livelihoods as well as for enhancing active citizenship or women's empowerment. In addition to literacy classes, REFLECT programmes also usually provide funding for small community projects that are supposed to enhance collaboration between the community members.

In a pure REFLECT method, the learning materials are produced together with the participants. NAEAL, however, found it better to develop ready-made learning materials so that the quality of the literacy circles would be more even, and they could be delivered by various organizations. The development of "the Books", that is, manuals for facilitators and learners went through a long process of trial and error. Materials were produced piece by piece by a small group of people. Then they were tested in study circles and revised after analysing how they had worked, and then tested again. (Interview 27D22, 20 November 2012, NAEAL representative in the design group) The books proved to be important in boosting NAEAL's image as a professional adult literacy provider, because the MoE as well as the various donors recognized them.

All in all, different types of professionalism were needed within the organization. As was mentioned above, managing the relationships with donors was a key competence of the executive director. The field staff were knowledgeable on how to relate to communities and experts in mobilization skills, facilitation, and local languages. Project coordinators were experts in training literacy facilitators and monitoring the circles. Many NAEAL employees had started out as facilitators and had then become field monitors or project coordinators after a lengthy career. Because of this professional background, their strength was specifically in community-based work.

The donors, however, had started to influence the profile of NAEAL staff and the way they were supposed to work in the communities. For example, the World Bank-financed EPAG project handpicked participants that were then trained in training centres by trainers with a university degree. This method gave better results in the short term and secured the donor's own legitimacy. University-trained staff was paid better than the old guard, which is reflected in the quote of a project coordinator that worked far away near the Ivorian border.

> Every pastor read the same book but collect different money. (Interview 23N1, 6 March 2012, NAEAL Project coordinator)

Donors expected other forms of professionalism as well. These were related to project management and administrative capacities, and especially to the narrative and financial reporting.

The donor world revolves around written reports. The reports were written in English, which is the official language in Liberia. However, the local Liberian English differs significantly from the language that donors use. Only a minority of Liberians speak or write English as most of them use their vernacular language. This means that the local organizations need staff that dominates the language needed in the field of development cooperation. In addition to English, this includes the buzzwords and concepts used within the field.

Financial management and reporting were also high on the donor requirements, and these started to be more important within NAEAL as well. Monday meetings were a gathering of all staff, including administrative personnel, project coordinators, and field staff that was in Monrovia at that time. The meetings had a section on updates on ongoing projects and on the ones that were about to be signed with donors. A major part of the meeting was spent on financial management and other administrative issues. The financial manager was attending various trainings on NGO financial management, and the requirements on things like proper receipts and request for money that the field staff and project coordinators handed to the financial manager seemed to be growing stricter from 2012 to 2013 when I attended the Monday meetings. The new way of thinking started to enter the financial administrator's speech as he urged everybody to address the issues because "we need standards as an institution".

The financial manager was not the only one to attend donor training, since capacity building was currently fashionable in development circles.

The justification that donors gave for engaging in capacity building in Liberia was that it was the way to enhance individual NGO's and CSO's organizational capacity which would make them better representatives of their members, better performers, and more sustainable. This in turn would strengthen the local civil society to be able to monitor the government and to contribute to a vibrant society. (IREX.)

However, another driver for the capacity building could be its role as a legitimating act within the sector (Kühl 2009; Brinkerhoff 2015). Training, workshops, and guidelines serve as a vehicle to spread the tools and practices that enhance normative isomorphism within the field (Tvedt 1998; Claeyé & Jackson 2012). With these means, the local organizations learn the terminology that is needed to be able to act and to communicate with the field. The NGOs that have been capacitated are then able to "translate" the local reality to the donors and act as brokers between the communities and the field of development cooperation (Bierschenk et al. 2002).

During my stay in Liberia in 2013, it was clear that steps were being taken from reconstruction towards a longer-term development phase. The newspapers and conferences emphasized the Liberians' ownership of their own development, and that Liberians, in the form of the government of Liberia, were in the drivers' seat.

All the donors seemed to be in a hurry to "phase themselves out". The programmes were ending as financing for re-construction could not be justified anymore, and it was time to hand over the implementation of development to the locals. The transition to development financing required very different skills, so capacity-building efforts needed to be re-designed. The most pressing skill was being able to apply for money from international sources. Therefore, trainings in project proposal writing were urgent. Other popular topics were managing the project cycle including monitoring and evaluation, organizational development with special emphasis on financial management, leadership, advocacy, mainstreaming gender and youth, and anti-corruption.

As there was no coordination between the donors, there was an overlap of themes and efforts provided by different donors. Usually, an organizational capacity assessment (OCA) was made to choose the elements that were most in need of improvement. Every programme has its own OCA and NAEAL had been through four different OCA processes.

The contents of the capacity building were a combination of what was deemed important within development cooperation and the inclination of the respective donor. For example, the Dutch 5D model for organizational development had a systemic view as its starting point and it saw capacity development as an internal, non-linear process that could be affected by internal and external factors (Keijzer et al. 2011). The assessment made by ZOA identified financial management, proposal writing, M&E, leadership training for board and management, sociotherapy, and advocacy as the most pressing needs for NAEAL's capacity development.

The World Bank-sponsored EPAG programme was very precise on a detailed follow-up of plans and quality control. They gave training that was directly applicable to work situations such as class management, conflict management, and facilitation skills that were directly related to the study materials that the teachers or facilitators were about to use in their teaching. For example, very hands-on training was given on the data collection systems and reporting formats.

> Like X will coach lots of meetings with NAEAL about data entries and how to use the excel and what need for the attendance and he will go and sit with their team for the whole day. Because we need this data, we don't want them to spend so much time in doing it again and again, and again. (Interview 015D41, 29 February 2012, Donor representative)

The Finnish Refugee Council (FRC) relied more on joint learning. Development of the training materials, a revised adult literacy programme for the Ivorian refugees as well as the digital monitoring system for the literacy circles were done as a trail-and-error process together with the NAEAL personnel that worked in FRC projects.

In 2013, special capacity development programmes for the local civil society started to appear with the aim to increase the local CSO's organizational capacity so that they could represent their members and monitor government policy, performance, and expenditure. Long aid chains were also present in capacity building that was organized. The money flowed through international NGOs that first selected five to seven local umbrella organizations to be trained as master trainers. These organizations then selected local NGOs from their networks to be capacitated. The NGOs that got the opportunity to participate were valued as the best ones in the country with potential for further improvement. (Interview with NARDA, 27 November 2013) As the same agenda items run through over fifty to two hundred local NGOs, there was certainly a very powerful isomorphic process in motion.

NAEAL participated in one of these programmes through NARDA, one of the local CSO networks. The programme was sponsored by USAID and coordinated by International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), a global development and education organization, which then contracted NARDA to be one of the local implementing organizations. Based on the organizational capacity assessment, NAEAL took part in financial management training, mentoring in leadership and board management, a gender-mainstreaming workshop, and workshops on conflict resolution and people's right to land. (Interview with NARDA, 27 November 2013)

Capacity building was abundantly on offer. I return to this issue in section 6.3 and discuss the managerial strategies that NAEAL used to cope with capacity building, that is, either conforming to learning for legitimacy or portraying compliance.

To summarize NAEAL's actions towards normative legitimacy demands, NAEAL was embracing the various capacity-building efforts which boosted its legitimacy within the donor community. Its professional take on adult literacy combined with an extensive outreach in local communities enhanced NAEAL's normative legitimacy, which was further consolidated by the professionalism of its staff and the charisma of its leader.

6.2.4 Cultural-cognitive legitimacy: fluency in taken-for-granted terminology and practices

Cultural-cognitive legitimacy refers to shared understandings that are needed for taken-for-grantedness in a specific context. The field of development cooperation has its own cultural-cognitive features that are taken-for-granted by the members of this field. These include being fluent in development buzzwords and mastering the tools and practices that are used irrespective of geographical location. The main aspects needed for cultural-cognitive legitimacy are taught to local NGOs in workshops and other capacity-building efforts. In addition to the use of legitimate vocabularies and practices and methods, secondments by respected donor representatives enhanced NAEAL's cultural-cognitive legitimacy among other donor organizations.

The use of legitimate vocabularies is common in different organizational fields. For example, Sahlin and Wedlin (2008) describe how fashionable management ideas and the respective vocabularies, such as service and customer concepts in the 1990s, or evaluations and rankings in the early 2000s, were picked up by public sector organizations. Within the field of development cooperation, these vocabularies are the various concepts, or development buzzwords, that sustain the models, myths, and passions of this particular field. Many of these concepts have many possible meanings and carry a normative tune that makes it difficult to criticize them (Cornwall 2007). These include words such as poverty, empowerment, community, gender, or development itself.

The word that was most frequently used in my data was partnership, which has been among the development buzzwords for a long time (Crawford 2003). NAEAL would refer to donors as well as to the government as partners, and a CBO representative referred to partnership when talking about NAEAL (Interview 9CC1, 28 February 2012, CBO representative). Within NAEAL, the most fluent with the vocabulary were the project coordinators that had university-level training. In workshops, they would be the ones to reproduce concepts such as empowerment, gender, or community ownership. However, field staff also fluently used the vocabulary related to projects and reporting. Implementing or piloting projects, disseminating best practices, lessons learned, and success stories, as well as getting feedback and recommendations was part of everyone's parlance. This reflects the influence that the monitoring and reporting tools in use had.

Especially the ones that write reports to donors need to master the vocabulary to be able to communicate with donors. Writing reports is a skill that is essential in development, and it was crucial for NAEAL. Other legitimate practices and methods that appeared in my data were the use of participatory approaches as well as project cycle management and monitoring tools.

The importance of written communication is a typical feature within the field of development cooperation. For example, Dar (2014) has analysed the challenges that Indian NGOs encountered in their relationships with donors regarding reports and accountability relationships. Administrative reports to donors were found to be more valuable than the oral communication between local NGOs and their clients and narrative information on changes (Dar 2014).

I made similar observations in Liberia. As was shown in the previous chapter, donors considered the quality of reports very important, and they would require several re-writes of a single report. It seems that for the field of development cooperation something that is not codified in writing does not exist. In an evaluation (CDRA 2013), NAEAL received significant critique on the lack of documentation of monitoring information and learnings. NAEAL was urged to invest in staff's writing skills through workshops, writing short stories from the communities, and in general, documenting what they had learned.

English is usually the second language for people and even high school graduates have difficulties in expressing themselves in writing. The use of the English language featured as a power imbalance between the donors and the local actors. While observing workshops and other events where both donors and Liberian actors were present, I observed that it was mainly the foreigners who spoke. When group work started, young, international development professionals would pick up the marker and start leading the conversation. Liberians would sit quietly as the foreigners were brainstorming solutions to local problems. I think that at least partly this was because the foreigners were more fluent with the development buzzwords that are common regardless of the geographical location. They facilitate the communication among the development elite and, unintentionally, leave the Liberians out.

In a non-writing community learning practices are also more embedded in verbal and symbolic interactions (Styhre et al 2006). Within the Liberian context, oral communication was more appreciated and trusted than the written word. Even phone calls were considered more reliable than e-mails. This caused misunderstandings as donors expected that NAEAL would reply promptly to e-mails and NAEAL representatives were trying to arrange face-to-face meetings with the donors.

One of the most common practices within development cooperation is the participatory workshop. As Watkins and Swidler (2012, 208) note, workshops are a set of ritualized practices. They include the hymn and prayer in the beginning, various breaks for food and beverages, participation in working groups, and other lively methods that are commonly known to all in the field.

I have lived within the "culture" of development cooperation since the 1980s. Liberia was foreign to me, but I sensed an instant familiarity as I started to organize an M&E workshop in collaboration with the local FRC monitoring officer. We had a common script provided by the field. We had only met but we were able to coordinate a three-day workshop together because we both knew how to make a facilitator's time plan, how to accommodate breaks, working groups, and energizers. I was told that one of the field monitors was especially gifted in energizers. So we booked a nice venue and ordered meals, organized our materials, flipcharts, pens, masking tape, laptop, and projector. We asked the executive director to decide who would participate in the event. It was a fun and useful three days, especially for me, because I was able to gather a large amount of information on the staff's understandings of M&E through participatory methods.

Workshops make everyone happy. For the donors, they are easy to count and tick the box for activities done, and messages delivered. For the locals, it is entertainment, an opportunity to meet with colleagues, and a source of some material benefits. (Watkins & Swidler 2012; Smith 2003.) Watkins and Swidler (2012, 210) note that, contrary to donor perception that workshops offer an equalizing space, they usually reflect social hierarchies. This could be seen in our exercise as well, as we asked the executive director to choose the participants and the only board member that attended the workshop was given a lot of space.

In workshops, participants learn how to re-produce the above-mentioned buzzwords as well as acquire new ideas and knowledge. Some NAEAL staff members worked on projects that offered various donor-sponsored events. They had an opportunity to mix with donor representatives and to connect with other Liberians who were among the incipient development industry elite that was familiarizing itself with the language and manners of the field of development cooperation and obtaining access to networks. Watkins and Swidler (2012, 211) call these people the elite brokers, who are familiar with the latest donor fads and can utilize them in their own patron–client relationships.

Finally, cultural-cognitive legitimacy within the donor community could also be gained through the reputation and recommendations given by others as the donors trusted each other.

> .. we met X from ActionAid on our way to XXX and he recommended NAEAL to us… (Interview 26D21, 21 March 2012, Donor representative)

This phenomenon resonates with the idea that donors relied on the legitimacy assessment made by their peers and those other partnerships increase reputation and legitimacy for all partners (Brinkerhoff 2005, 10).

In sum, cultural-cognitive legitimacy pressures relate to the various tools and practices as well as legitimate vocabularies that are taken-for-granted within the field of development cooperation. NAEAL was getting familiar with these through workshops and other connections to donors and was also gaining a positive reputation among donors, which enhanced its legitimacy further.

6.3 Emerging managerial strategies: complying with donor requirements while taking care of the NAEAL family

Strategies that NAEAL used to deal with various donor pressures for legitimacy ranged from compliance to portraying compliance. The first emerging managerial strategy that I identified was *conforming* (Suchman 1995), which included *complying* with donor contracts and the various obligations that are included in these contracts and *conforming* to donor expectations on how a local NGO should look like and behave. Secondly, NAEAL also *influenced* (Elbers & Arts 2011) the donors by sensitizing them to locally successful ways of working. The third strategy of *striving for independence* presented itself in practices where, instead of conforming to all donor expectations, NAEAL *portrayed* compliance. This included being consistent with the discourse on partnership despite frustrations caused by donors. NAEAL also *buffered* its organization against excessive reliance on just a few donors by looking for funding and alliances with new donors. Finally, a strategy that I call *taking care of the NAEAL family*, could be identified. This strategy related to the local logic of seeing the employer as a patron that was responsible for its workers even outside the contractual relationship. In this section, I continue to reflect on how the pressures for legitimacy as well as the managerial actions and strategies taken affect the characteristics of the organization and vice versa.

Conforming

Conforming (Suchman 1995) in this case meant *complying* with donor contracts and *conforming* to the different expectations and taking part in in activities that were aimed at transforming NAEAL into a proper local NGO according to the donor standards.

> … we fight hard to meet up with the donor requirement ... we go according to their format they tell us. (Interview 5N1, 24 February 2012, NAEAL Programme manager)

Complying with donor contracts was mandatory. Depending on the donor, the contracts had specific targets and monitoring and reporting requirements. Compliance secured the flow of financial resources but also contributed to gaining and maintaining NAELA's legitimacy as an efficient implementer. There was, however, interdependence (Ebrahim 2003) between NAEAL and its donors as the donors needed NAEAL in a situation of short deadlines and fixed targets and with only a few good implementing organizations available. In return for the financial inputs, donors received information and a positive reputation that helped them maintain their own legitimacy among their reference groups.

Donors used an excessive amount of accountability mechanisms to secure their own position in the contractual relationship. With results-based management, monitoring and reporting on outcomes and impacts had increased, but the reporting on input and output continued.

Fulfilling all the requirements for monitoring and reporting was a time-consuming exercise as each donor had their own tools and templates. Each project had its goals and indicators that were carefully monitored through field visits, quality controls, and data gathering from literacy circles, reports and evaluations. During an M&E workshop that I conducted with NAEAL staff in March 2012, we compiled all the different monitoring and evaluation tools that were being used simultaneously in different projects that NAEAL was executing, and the total came up to 86 different tools. These ranged from checking the learners' study books to weekly plans and reports to impact evaluations conducted by outside consultants. (NAEAL 2012a.)

The information flowed mainly from the field workers to the office in Monrovia. The field monitor would pass attendance forms and other information to the project coordinator that stopped by to collect the monitoring information on his way to, for example, Monrovia. The project coordinator passed the information to the project manager, who would then write the donor report. Next, the report was delivered to the donor, who would then hold a meeting with the Executive Director and comment on the report.

> So X (the executive director) will tell you, I think each report we did I think probably a minimum of three rewrites, so we are pretty picky about of what, you know… I am impressed with NAEAL. They learn from feedback. (Interview 015D41, 29 February 2012, Donor representative)

The report would then be re-written until it met the donor criteria.

As the systems of donors varied, each project team had a different way of monitoring and reporting. Tools were abundant, but the staff members had difficulties to specify what kind of information was produced and for what purpose. Both NAEAL staff and evaluators (CDRA 2013) had noticed that a large amount of data was being gathered but there was little capacity inside NAEAL to process and analyse the data as they were mainly passed on to the donors. The executive director was the only one that met with the donor representatives to discuss the reports and it was then up to the director to pass the information back to the staff members.

Because of this fragmentation, the internal evaluation capacity of NAEAL was not developing as it could have been and an overall picture of their work as an organization was not forming. The challenges that NAEAL had with M&E were not atypical and not even related only to Southern NGOs, but more to the aid chain and hierarchies within it. When Mebrahtu (2002) studied INGO perceptions and practices of M&E in Ethiopia, she found differences between the views of staff in different hierarchical positions. The UK office staff saw M&E as a tool for learning and empowerment. For the country office staff, it was a means for improvement of internal standards and of securing funding. The field office staff, on the other hand, considered M&E as a way to "keep the ones above us happy" that is, a tool for upwards accountability. The field staff of the studied INGOs did not know why they collected the information, nor did they receive feedback from their superiors.

Conforming as a management strategy refers here to "looking like an NGO" (Brinkerhoff 2005). The aspects that were described in chapter 5 in connection to the national legislation concerning NGOs meant that NAEAL had the structural characteristics expected from a local NGO regarding documentation, governance, personnel, and administrative aspects. Donors added to these requirements their expectations of behaviour that was considered professional within the field of development cooperation (see also Kontinen et al. 2015). These behaviours were taught through the various capacity-building efforts described in the previous chapter. Capacity building is a strong force in spreading the scripts of the field of development cooperation and in making the actors become isomorphic with each other. At the beginning of the 2010s, various donors in Liberia were offering capacity building that enhanced the efficient delivery of projects, their planning, monitoring and evaluation, as well as rigorous financial administration and reporting. In addition to these, also various themes that were fashionable within the sector, such as gender and women's empowerment, advocacy, or land rights, were on the learning agenda. The delivery of capacity building consisted of the North teaching the South.

Conforming to donor-driven learning agendas had various consequences to NAEAL as an organization. As NAEAL depended on the training and capacity building offered by the donors, there was the danger of adaptation to the field of development cooperation and of losing focus of the organizations own strategic development as it was not in control of the development of its human resources. Project-based funding meant that opportunities for training were allocated unevenly between the staff members. Project-based and individualized learning did not support organizational learning, as each project had its own focus and content for learning. For example, as each of the donors had its own systems for monitoring and evaluation, NAEAL struggled to develop its internal M&E system that would provide an overall picture of NAEAL 's work as an organization.

Another aspect that infiltrated from the donor world was the understanding of what the proper ways of learning were. The philosophical undertone of NAEAL was the Freirean idea that knowledge and wisdom reside in people themselves. However, the value of informal opportunities for learning within the organization went unnoticed and formal education, such as university degrees and workshop attendance, were appreciated (Workshop on evaluation dissemination, Field diary 13 December 2013). For example, the opportunity to share and learn among the project coordinators that worked in a large office room was not seen as a learning event.

> Sometime discussions are held, sometime we sit and discuss about especially about the manual, we want to know what is happening to your programme, what happen to the last sections, and how was it facilitated so we sometimes sit and discuss those things yea, but it is not a formal meeting where we are called meeting where somebody chairing no is just a discussion across the table. (Interview 002N3, 9 December 2013, Project coordinator)

The problem in NAEAL, as in many other organizations, was how to transform individual knowledge into organizational learning. Despite efforts to share learnings and to engage in organizational development projects, time constraints hindered organizational learning. This meant that not much of the learnings were put into practice. A change in organizational practices needs a long-term commitment and allocation of time from the leadership and the whole organization. Even in the most promising situation, capacity can fade away with changes in personnel or changes in the context that the organization works in.

Despite the donor efforts to mould NAEAL and the Liberian civil society into proper actors for the field of development cooperation, it did not always go as expected. Smillie (2001) noted in various case studies that in a reconstruction period donor projects and the capacity building they offer are very short-term, which is not conducive to learning. The most common forms of capacity building tend to be training and technical assistance (James & Wrigley 2007, 66; Kühl 2009, 571) although experiential and process-led approaches, modular inputs, mentoring, and coaching might have more impact.

Influencing

There were also possibilities to *influence* the donors. The discussions that the executive director had with the donor representatives were also an opportunity for them to broaden their understanding of the local context and what was feasible in Liberia (Interview 15D41, 29 February 2012, Donor representative). As most of the local donor representatives shared NAEAL's goals to promote social transformation in Liberia through adult literacy, they felt they themselves learned good practices from NAEAL for promoting adult literacy in the communities. For example, if there were problems related to donor-designed contents of courses that were too demanding for the participants, some donor representatives would modify them according to the feedback from NAEAL. Many of the local donor staff members commented favourably on the possibility to accompany NAEAL to the communities, to see for themselves how the literacy circles were organized, and to engage with the community members. (Interview 29D32, 27 November 2012, Donor representative)

The position that a staff member had within a donor organization affected the possibilities to act on local knowledge. Many of the donor representatives I met were also caught in the middle of the local context and the requirements, plans, and reporting templates coming from their head offices. This seems to be common within the field of development cooperation as, for example, Mebrahtu (2002) reports a similar phenomenon from Ethiopia. Ostrom et al. (2002) found that compliance with spending budgets and reporting success will further the donor staff member's career. The staff of the donor organizations is deployed on short-term contracts, so their incentive is to meet the short-term targets because they will not be around for the long-term development results to occur. According to my interviews, for staff members that were higher up in the organizational hierarchy, it was possible to induce modifications to the plans. Especially this combined with flexible implementation strategies offered more opportunities for local adaptation of the programmes. This was the case of the Finnish Refugee Council and the Advancing Youth Program that started with an action research phase and was linked to high-level officials within USAID (Interview 30D72, 30 November 2012, Donor representative).

Striving for independence

There were also elements of *striving for independence* in NAEAL's dealings with the donors. These consisted of *portraying* compliance, for example, by taking part in capacity-building events and by engaging in the official partnership discourse, and of *buffering* the organization by looking for alternative sources for financing. Elbers and Arts (2011) define portraying as deliberate tactics that are used to manipulate donor perceptions. Local NGOs perform the act of compliance and pretend to be responsive and committed to various donor initiatives. Elbers and Arts (2011) also found that local NGOs in India and Ghana buffered their organizational functions by transferring funds between projects or by shielding parts of the organization from donor influences.

Portraying compliance could be found, for example, in the enthusiasm to accept invitations to capacity-building initiatives by various donors. Although NAEAL staff had already participated in various capacity-building efforts on M&E they still placed it on their wish list with the next donor when they were asked about capacities to be developed within the organization. Probably they had learned that this was a topic that would be financed by the donors. Another dream they had was having a separate M&E unit, although it would have been very costly for an organization that did not have an allowance for overhead costs, and it does not necessarily lead to organizational learning either. This arrangement was, however, common in the donor organizations and NAEAL wished to mimic the practice that seemed to be legitimate within the field.

As Goddard and Mussa (2006) have shown, bookkeeping is a symbol of organizational capacity, and it is used to maintain legitimacy. Financial integrity is a major concern for donors and therefore several donors provided NAEAL with training on financial management and hands-on guidance on how to complete the required reports. The donors were satisfied with the financial management as long as they received the information concerning their own project. Each donor had its own template for financial reporting, which meant that NAEAL kept separate bookkeeping for each donor instead of having a general bookkeeping that would have provided an overall picture of the financial situation of the organization. Donor requirements were passed on to the field staff, which meant that the practices differed between projects. Keeping the deadlines for receipts and reconciliations was demanding for the field staff and caused tension between the financial manager and the project staff. The completion of the accounts was a requirement for the next instalment by the donor, so the management of the financial process was key to the organization.

The role of financial information in the internal decision-making was, however, limited. The board members had difficulties forming a coherent picture of the financial situation of the organization because the financial system was organized based on projects. This made it difficult for them to take responsibility for the overall management of the organization and its development and therefore undermined the internal accountability and governance function.

The discourse on partnership is a typical feature of the field of development cooperation and it can camouflage the power disparities that are embedded in the donor-recipient relationships (Tvedt 1996; Lister 2000). NAEAL staff always referred to donors as partners. Refraining from outright criticism of donors or their practices was consistent throughout the organization, though especially when discussing the amount of resources that the production of information and writing reports took up, I could sense frustration.

Okker's (2015) study on Liberian NGOs showed that the power donors had in the form of various resources caused more frustration and a sense of otherness than the obvious cultural differences. Liberian NGO leaders' view on good partnership consisted of open communication, sharing of skills and capacities, respect and flexibility, mutual accountability, and relationship building. Interpersonal relationships as a basis for good partnership (Eyben 2010) seemed to be important also for Liberians (Okker 2015). However, donors are more apt to trust control systems and management technologies and interpersonal relationships might implicate corruption or nepotism (Alexius & Vähämäki 2020).

Buffering came in the form of looking for funding from various sources, both from traditional donors, the private sector, and from selling NAEAL's study materials to other organizations.

The active hunt for projects took time and effort, but having various donors also acted as a buffer against dependency on one sole source of financing. Reliance on very few donors for financing renders an NGO vulnerable to changes in that donor's priorities, as has been noted by, for example, Hudock (1999, 63). Having multiple donors and multiple projects also enabled the possibility to transfer staff members from one project to another and some leverage for negotiation when it came to small investments, capacity-building opportunities, and overheads.

Another peculiar example concerned financial management. Three different donor programmes had trained NAEAL staff in financial management and two of those promised that a bookkeeping program would be installed on the office computer. As delivery times were long and promises uncertain, both donors were left with the impression that the bookkeeping program was needed.

Taking care of the NAEAL family

Finally, based on my analysis, I coined a strategy of *taking care of the NAEAL family*. The donor practices of short contracts caused a fluctuation in NAEAL's budget from year to year, and sometimes from month to month, which posed major challenges to the organization and its relations with staff members. Especially as in Liberia, an employer is seen as a patron that has responsibilities for its workers that go further than the normal employer-employee relationship. The organization was even referred to as the NAEAL family and the staff members told heartfelt stories about times they had been taken care of by the organization when they had been sick or injured.

NAEAL's management seemed to have a strong psychological contract with the staff members, as anxiety was very much present when it came to securing work for the staff. The management assured everyone they were "hunting for projects" and would inform the staff members as soon as possible if an opening became available, as some staff members were in-between jobs as their projects had ended. This meant that "some may sit a little before we renew the contract". The management was also trying to find ways to secure funds for all the statutory personnel costs for people, such as an end-of-the-contract allowance.

Another way to provide some compensation for people that were "resting", "sitting small" or "volunteers" was to send them to workshops and trainings. Sending them to events was a way to compensate for the loss caused by unemployment and also an effort to maintain the unity of the NAEAL family. At the same time, it allowed the organization to present the required number of participants to all available trainings. Another segment of the staff that was omitted from training was the administrative staff that was not directly involved in projects. Because training was also considered a benefit or an incentive, a person responsible for procurement could be sent to a workshop on people's right to land, which had very little connection to the person's work. The places in workshops were filled with people with time to spare, or as a reward, as these events were an opportunity to acquire some benefits and mingle with other people within the development sector. Workshopping also provided amusement and material benefits, such as food and beverages and, for example, stationary.

In conclusion, four sets of emerging managerial strategies were identified in relation to donor pressures for legitimacy. Firstly, NAEAL *conformed* to various donor pressures. It *complied* with service contracts and their requirements. This included furnishing the donors with monitoring info and reports that they needed to meet their own back donor's requirements. It also *conformed* to what was expected from a local NGO, especially by learning the different practices and ways of parlance that were transmitted through capacity building. Some of this was, however, ceremonial (Oliver 1991) as the purpose of different tools and development trends were not necessarily clear nor adaptable to the local circumstances. Secondly, NAEAL had some possibilities to *influence* the donors. This was done by engaging in discussions with donor representatives and showing how locally meaningful work could be done. Thirdly, NAEAL *strived for independence* also in its relationships with donors. To do this, it *portrayed* compliance, especially when it came to maintaining the discourse on partnership, and *buffered* itself by looking constantly for new projects and donors and ways to finance its activities. Finally, the strategy of *taking care of the NAEAL family* emerged and included the efforts that the management made to level the negative influences of short-term donor policies as well as the local way of attaching various responsibilities to a good employer. In addition to providing staff with employment, also the ones that were between jobs could be sent to capacity-building events or given tasks as volunteers at the office.

6.4 Chapter conclusions

In this chapter, I have presented the donors as a major legitimacy audience because of the financial and other resources that they possess. The immaterial resources derive from the field of development cooperation in the form of norms and practices that NAEAL needs to learn to be considered as a legitimate local actor within the field.

Donors were a heterogeneous group that ranged from large organizations that are central within the field, such as the World Bank or UN organizations, to USAID and various international NGOs. Local actors, such as the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund and a private company, Equatorial Palm Oil, were also among the funders of NAEAL's work.

Different forms of legitimacy requirements were present in the interaction between NAEAL and its donors. Pressures for regulative legitimacy came in the form of binding service contracts and performance-based payment schemes. Pragmatic legitimacy pressures manifested themselves in the implementation of projects and the various monitoring, reporting, and evaluation requirements that safeguarded the donor's own upwards accountability requirements. Normative legitimacy demands were related to the features that the field of development cooperation typically attaches to proper local NGOs. This included embracing the opportunities to learn these demands, and at the same time displaying the qualities of a professional adult literacy provider. An additional factor was the charisma of the organization's leader, which could be harnessed through his active engagement with the donors. Through engagement with the donors, NAEAL became familiar with the tools and practices, buzzwords, and concepts that enhanced its cultural-cognitive legitimacy among the donors.

NAEAL used four managerial strategies to cope with donor pressures for legitimacy. Firstly, NAEAL *conformed* to donor pressures for legitimacy by complying to the performance-based service contracts and their requirements. NAEAL also conformed to the donor expectations on what a local NGO should look like and learned the various practices and ways of communication that were common within the field. Secondly, NAEAL exercised *influence* by displaying locally feasible tools and strategies. Thirdly, *striving for independence* was done through portraying compliance which was sometimes necessary to cope with the overflow of donor initiatives and in maintaining partnerships. Buffering was exercised to broaden the financial base of the organization by looking for new partners and, for example, by selling learning materials. Lastly, the management engaged in *taking care of the NAEAL family* by hunting for projects and distributing benefits among staff and even among those that were not currently employed.

Although NAEAL was able to resist some pressures for isomorphism that came from the field by portraying compliance, changes in the organizational attributes occurred.

Battilana and Dorado's (2010) case study from Bolivia shows how different professional backgrounds were combined within a microfinance organization. Staff that worked with the poor customers had a background in social work or anthropology, but the ones that were dealing with lending money had a background in finance, auditing, or the law.

These kinds of tendencies were also visible in NAEAL as the donor requirements for a specific type of staff started to change the profile of the staff and what was considered professional within the organization. The executive director and the programme manager had to be fluent in the donor language and the practices of the field of development cooperation because they were the ones that presented and wrote the reports. Respectively, the field staff would be fluent in local languages and have the mobilization and animation skills needed in the communities. In addition to this, university degrees had started to be a requirement for some donors. The university graduates were quick to adapt to donor language and requirements and they were also paid more. This put pressure on other staff members to engage in studies for a university degree during their free time.

The appreciation of university degrees, and the donor capacity-building interventions, transmitted ideas of what was considered proper learning. In addition to the challenges of transforming individual learning into organizational learning, also the fact that workshops were attended based on attachment to a certain donor inhibited organization-wide learning and caused confusion because of the different stances that donors had on the field-level paradigms. In addition, not all tools and trends suited the local context, which led to only ceremonial adaptation.

Project-based work that included donor-specific monitoring and financial and narrative reporting challenged the governance of the organization as the board members did not have the possibility to create a holistic picture of the situation within the organization. At the same time, financial and project management started to become important functions within the organization instead of the skills of delivering the core function of adult literacy.

The need to constantly look for new projects and opportunities meant that constant care had to be taken to preserve the organization's identity as an adult education specialist because projects with other aims could lure it in other directions.

In Chapter 7 I return to the local context and NAEAL's relationship with the numerous communities that it worked with. As was already seen in the managerial strategy of taking care of the NAEAL family, in the local context patronage is expected from actors that are in positions of power and control resources. This tendency continues with the communities and exemplifies NAEAL's position between the local context and the international field of development cooperation.

7 PATRONAGE WITH COMMUNITIES

In this chapter, I examine the legitimacy pressures stemming from the communities in which NAEAL was working and the organization's managerial responses to them. The legitimacy provided by the communities is an important asset for NAEAL. Its ability to work with the communities is needed for maintaining legitimacy with donors when it competes for donor-funded projects.

The fulfilment of its mission depends on the work done in the communities and the learning results within the literacy circles and the possible impacts on people's lives.

This chapter draws mainly from the data I collected in the literacy circles that NAEAL implemented in mainly rural and fishing communities in Margibi, Bomi, and Cape Mount counties, in EPAG projects in Grand Bassa, and the literacy circles at the Ivorian refugee camp in Nimba during the three visits to Liberia in 2012 to 2013. I had the opportunity to interview learners, facilitators, Literacy Management Committee members, and other community members, CBOs, and local NGOs. During these visits, I observed practices in literacy circles, facilitator trainings, and various kinds of monitoring visits and noted my observations and reflections in my field diary.

In what follows, I will discuss my findings concerning the nature of the communities as a legitimacy audience and the pressures for legitimacy they present to NAEAL. These pressures may be subtle and the responses that NAEAL provides may be inadequate. Moreover, I identified a kind of "reverse legitimacy", where the communities, in contrast to presenting legitimacy demands for the NGO, sought themselves legitimacy in the eyes of the organization. The communities had expectations for material benefits beyond the literacy circle and hoped that NAEAL would enter into a patronage relationship with them. These expectations, however, were not fully replicated because NAEAL was restricted by donor practices and timetables. Meanwhile, communities and NAEAL joined forces to fulfil the various donor demands for results and accountability to keep the resources flowing. This created a situation where legitimacy was reversed and instead of NAEAL trying to secure legitimacy from the communities, the communities acted as if they needed legitimacy from the NGO.

Table 6 presents the findings of this chapter.

TABLE 6 Legitimacy audience: communities

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Legitimacy audience: communities
- Communities provide legitimacy for the whole field of development cooperation and the sector of adult education.
- Their power is related to patronage relationships.
- Communities are a heterogeneous group and internally diverse.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Actions in response to different types of legitimacy pressures</td></tr>
<tr><td>Regulatory</td><td>Pragmatic</td><td>Normative</td><td>Cultural-cognitive</td></tr>
<tr><td>Memorandum of Understanding with the Literacy Management Committee

A service contract with a community-based organization</td><td>Organization of literacy circles that provide improved literacy and life skills (service delivery)

Some forms of economic benefits and possibilities for side-tracking

Contacts to attract new patrons</td><td>New structures and practices

Provision of information for monitoring and evaluation

Hospitality towards visitors

Staff with facilitation skills

Staff with abilities to broker between the communities and the field of development cooperation</td><td>Culturally appropriate ways of behaviour (face-to-face interaction, dialogue with the communities)

Forming relationships based on trust and reciprocity

Field staff that is close to the communities, both physically and culturally</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">Emerging managerial strategies

- Brokering between donors and communities
- Entering a patronage relationship
- Co-creating responses to donor demands together with the communities
- Empowering women?</td></tr>
</table>

7.1 Communities: legitimacy in the networks of power

In this section, I will examine the heterogeneous character of the communities as a legitimacy audience and the multifaceted power relations within which legitimacy is constructed in NAEAL's relationship with the communities.

7.1.1 Power, patronage, and *small accountability*

As was described in the previous chapters, both the Ministry of Education and donors exercised different forms of power in their relationship with NAEAL. The donors reflect the power of the institutional field of development cooperation in the form of various resources that range from financing to professional norms and social understandings common for the field. The MoE possesses power in the local context because it represents the government and regulates the education sector.

The legitimacy that the communities confer to NAEAL is important as the engagement with the communities and the results of the work done there provides NAEAL with legitimacy towards donors and the MoE and defines it as an NGO dedicated to advancing adult literacy in Liberia. One would think that this would position the communities as strong stakeholders and legitimacy audiences in relation to NAEAL.

The idea in organizational institutionalism is that a legitimacy audience assesses the legitimacy of an organization based on the characteristics of the organization and the expectations that the legitimacy audience has for it (Greenwood et al. 2017, 36). The communities' expectations in the development context are often formed by previous encounters with NGOs and other development actors (Olivier de Sardan 2005, 69, 139), and they have learned to expect that NGOs provide infrastructure and different kinds of services to the community. In return, different forms of community engagement and participation for the NGO activities are needed from the communities (Burchardt 2013).

These expectations combined with the resources that flow from the donors through NAEAL to the community might explain the reversal that happens in the power relationship between NAEAL and the communities. Instead of holding NAEAL accountable, the community members started seeking legitimacy in the eyes of the NGO to get access to the extra resources it could provide.

The reversed power relationship became clear when I asked the local CBO and LMC members how they monitored NAEAL. The first reaction to my question was nervous laughter. They insisted they did not monitor NAEAL and instead NAEAL was the one that monitored them.

> NAEAL monitor us, we don't monitor NAEAL. They want to know whether we actually going on the field, they want to know whether the circles we are running is functional, or whether we are lie to them all those things they will find out. (Interview 9CC1, 28 February 2012, Community Based Organization's representative)

This poses the question of who should monitor whom and where does the power lie in this relationship. While donors can withhold their contribution to an NGO, most communities have little means to hold NGOs accountable. However, to be able to demand and exercise accountability requires that the subordinates have the power to apply checks and constraints on the power holders. According to Schedler (1999), this gives rise to the two basic elements of accountability: answerability and enforceability. To be able to renegotiate and contest accountability relationships there needs to be an opportunity for exit and voice. In Hirschman's (1970, 96) terms the communities can exit by refusing the services or use their voice and complain about them. The ideal would of course be a situation where the community has the authority over decision-making, from setting priorities on development interventions to implementation and evaluation. In practice, NAEAL's specialization in adult education and back donor requirements shape the projects. Even though one community would reject their proposal for literacy intervention, NAEAL has always the possibility to move on to the next community.

The communities did however use means of "small accountability" to keep some checks and balances on NAEAL. This term was coined by NAEAL staff members about the different ways the community members used to keep track of what was happening in their community. They would very closely follow the visits that NAEAL or other actors paid to the community, with groups of people tailing them around the village. Community members would usually openly approach the visitors with many questions and requests and express their concern if there were too few visits to the community.

Small accountability captures the idea of what is referred to as the accountability of patronage by Leonardi (2004) in the sense that the community expects reciprocity and long-term commitment from the NGO. NAEAL was cast in the role of a patron along the lines of the local institution of patronage. Patronage refers to vertical ties and networks within which different kinds of resources are being distributed using social relationships of reciprocity (Smith 2003, 706). Once trust had been built, the expectation was that the relationship would be for the long term and that NAEAL would look after the community and its needs. The relationship was, however, limited by the availability of time and other resources allocated by the donors.

I will return to patronage as one of the emerging managerial strategies in section 7.3.

7.1.2 There is no such a thing as "a community": different stakes in a literacy circle

In 2011 and 2012, NAEAL had study circles in 13 counties, in more than 500 communities. These circles had 13,682 learners and 555 facilitators. (NAEAL 2012b.) As these numbers show, the NGO's outreach is impressive.

The tendency to speak of "communities" as if they were alike, homogeneous, and have internal coherence, overlooks the inequalities and existing social hierarchies that exist in any social relations (Guijt & Kaul Shah

1998, 7–9). However, as in this study case, the communities are different from each other, and they consist of different groups. Similarly, communities had differing motivations, and even contradicting stakes, for engaging in the interventions that NAEAL introduced to them. In what follows, I will use the process of setting up and running a literacy circle to describe how different stakes emerged and what kind of tensions they caused.

The communities differed from each other culturally, socially, economically, and geographically as can be expected of 500 communities spread over almost all of Liberia's fifteen counties. I had the chance to visit only a few communities, but even based on these limited observations, I could see a great variation between communities. There was a community with a well-kept school building with a football ground in front of it and a match was taking place. Smaller children played with cars that they had made out of wood and wire. The chairperson of the community was a woman with a lot of charisma and the overall feeling was energetic. In another community, there was a very different feeling. We were there to observe the literacy circle and programme staff gave feedback to the facilitator. Many sick and restless children accompanied their mothers in the literacy circle. Some of the community members seemed to suffer from anxiety or other health problems. No one approached me, not even the children. In most other places, children would surround me, stare at me and giggle.

When visiting the communities, it became apparent that many of them already had experience, good and bad, with donors and their projects. Therefore, they had already been in contact with the aid system and had been affected by it. There were traces of, for instance, the Norwegian Refugee Council, Danish Refugee Council, or the World Vision in every community. The housing, the school, and the water pumps had been built with the assistance of donor funds. There had been a series of peacebuilding exercises and even earlier literacy groups in the communities. Many of the projects had not been viable in the long run, and the communities had been left alone with, for example, pumps and other infrastructure that had started to fall apart because the communities did not have the resources to maintain them.

NAEAL's project officer told me about the situations when donors, or other actors, come and go to the communities and make false promises. Before NAEAL could start to work with the community, it had to regain the trust that had been lost in previous encounters with donor representatives.

> Yes there are some negative things. Is like initially when the programme started, the first group people who moved in the community, raise the expectation of the community people and they told them this group is going to give you some money, so that you can manage your own fund. And as the result of that, those groups that was even in existence people started to organize themselves so that they can benefit from this grant. There were lots of groups in the community. Some went and they begin to do some clearing and brushing, they say we have our agriculture group all of that. And forms were given, grant forms were given, it was kind of big volume of questionnaire. People went into the field sat with these people, question them fill in the form, at the end of the day nothing like that was done. So they felt so bad actually it was like we don't want to see you guys any longer. You deceive us.
>
> So good that NAEAL just enter the picture we use our social mobilization skills, talk with these people, brought them back on board, and then we just beginning to roll

> on. So why is true that you are not receiving physical cash, but the capacity building aspect of the programme is helpful we give you money today tomorrow it will be finish but when your capacity is build you can use it and make more money for yourself. So some reason we started moving on. So that was the negative thing it made us to fall about later. We came back together. (Interview 024N1, 6 March 2012, NAEAL project officer)

The mobilization skills referred to above were one of the assets NAEAL used in its work with the communities. Mobilization consisted of gathering the people together, inspiring, and motivating them to participate in an intervention. In addition, NAEAL needed to build trust with the communities so that they would accept a new programme to be implemented in their community. Trust has to be created and maintained, and it can also be lost. As communities had past experiences with donors and NGOs and may have been let down by them, NAEAL needed to convince the community of the need for a new intervention, this time in adult literacy. So NAEAL needed to persuade people to think that literacy was a capacity that was needed to function in the society and that it would bring benefits to the community if its members would know how to read and write.

Some communities rejected the offer, but a more usual case was to welcome the programme into the community. Especially rural communities further away from town centres and marketplaces welcomed the offer, while communities that had the opportunity to engage, for example, in trading activities in their locality had less time and interest to engage in a literacy programme.

When NAEAL got the assignment, it introduced the idea of having a literacy circle to the communities and they considered if they were willing to engage with the programme. The engagement included offering human resources for the Literacy Management Committee, finding a facilitator and the learners as well as offering a space for the gatherings. These were usually meeting huts, town halls, or school buildings. With these practices, the donors considered that the community's commitment to the programme would be boosted, and this was also taken as an indicator of the communities' ownership.

Once a community decided that they wished to have a literacy programme in their village, NAEAL would advise the community on how to form a Literacy Management Committee (LMC) and villagers would then select members for the LMC among the different community stakeholder groups. The LMC was a new structure within the community and disputes among the different leadership structures and problems might be caused by the lack of support from the local chiefs.

Then the LMC elected officers, such as a chairperson and a secretary, for itself. Usually, the literacy facilitator functioned as the secretary because that person may be the only literate person in the LMC. NAEAL supported the LMC by offering leadership training and providing moral support and "encouragement, as they are not used to having quarterly meetings".

The Literacy Management Committee was supposed to enhance the community's skills for peaceful co-existence. When needed, the committee resolved problems that might arise within the study circle. There might be conflicts between the group members or outsiders related to things like jealousy, fighting, and quarrelling. As most of the learners were women, a husband might not want his wife to participate in the study circles, which were usually led by a male facilitator.

The LMC liaised with NAEAL, received and forwarded support to the circles such as learning materials and facilitator's monthly incentive. The learning materials were handed over in a clear plastic box that symbolized transparency. The box was opened, and the contents were counted in front of the community. The idea with the handing over of the materials publicly was to increase trust between the members of the community as everyone could see what was included in the donation. (Interview 26D21, 21 March 2012, Donor representative). The box contained study books, a pen, and an eraser for each participant. For the facilitator, there was a manual, markers, and cardboard for making study materials.

In practice, the work on adult literacy took place in communities through literacy circles. The literacy circle decided how often they would meet and at what times. The contents of the sessions had been planned in the learner's manual and the facilitator's manual. This had been found useful to secure a standard quality of the study circles although it did not follow the idea of a Freirean methodology that emphasizes that the materials should be produced by the participants themselves. The material used in the literacy circles was, however, a product of a participatory process in communities that had been undertaken by NAEAL in collaboration with the Finnish Refugee Council and the Ministry of Education. First, an assessment of learning needs and challenges had been done. Assessment results were then used in planning the practical content of the programme, such as how to calculate the prices of common market items, how to write names of commonly used items in the community and so forth.

In addition to overseeing the study circle activities, the LMC selected the facilitator and also supervised and "encouraged" him or her in case of non-performance. Facilitators were literate community members that had, for example, a high school level, or they might be local schoolteachers. Unlike in many other developing countries (Robinson-Pant 2008), the literacy facilitators were mainly men because it was very challenging to find literate women who could take up the task of being a facilitator because of women's low levels of education. Before starting as facilitators, candidates from different communities were gathered together for trainings provided by NAEAL. The trainings were structured around the facilitator's manual, and they consisted of lesson planning, delivery of the lessons in a respectful and participatory way, and group management. The facilitators gave demonstration lessons that were then discussed together with the group and NAEAL trainers.

I had the chance to discuss with a group of twenty facilitators that took part in a refresher training. I probed them on what motivated them in becoming a facilitator, and what kind of dreams they had for themselves and their communities. There were different motivational factors for becoming a facilitator.

Some of the younger male facilitators saw it as an opportunity to become a popular person in their community and wished to be on good terms with the elderly. As they said, they were aspiring “to be popular with the chiefs”. A majority would, however, state that they enjoyed seeing people learn. This was seen to increase decency and advancement in their communities. As this was a refresher training that took place some six months after the literacy classes had started, many of the facilitators had also observed some forms of personal growth taking place, such as becoming more confident and patient as individuals. (Refresher training for facilitators, Field dairy 22 February 2012)

When observing the literacy classes, it was obvious that the facilitator created the spirit of the group. An active and inspiring facilitator was able to create a relaxed and enthusiastic atmosphere within his group and a more authoritarian facilitator’s group might be more school-like. Many of the facilitators themselves struggled with the English language, which further affected the way they conducted the classes. The facilitator’s role was also important for the continuation of the study circle. The local CBO representative had noticed (Interview 9CC1, 28 February 2012, CBO representative) that it was important that the facilitator lived within the community and engaged with the learners outside the classes. Especially if the facilitator left the community or got sick, it was probable that the study circle would have difficulties to continue.

In addition to the initial and refresher training NAEAL offered on-the-job support to the facilitators, regularly visited the communities, mediated, and took part in problem-solving during the period of the study circle. NAEAL’s field staff also motivated learners who dropped out, assisted in mediating, and resolving conflicts among group members, managed material administration, and assisted with time management. They also collected baseline information and created a database for each literacy circle and monitored their advancement. Special visits were made to literacy circles that were lagging behind in their schedule. NAEAL’s support was provided for the nine-month period that was planned for completing level 1 of the literacy programme. After that, the literacy circle could continue with the community’s own support for the facilitator if they wished to do so. The ones that did continue usually paid the facilitator in goods like sacks of flour, or by doing work in his fields.

Within the communities, the interaction of the facilitator with the learners and the Literacy Management Committee was a delicate matter. The LMC was supervising the facilitator even though that person was a more educated person, and a hint of distrust can be observed in the following comment.

> We see his report like you are saying his statistics, his daily attendant, we also verified the learners book, the workbook because the facilitator could make his own report but we verified by looking into the learner’s workbook. (Interview 10CM1, 28 December 2012, LMC representative)

Another friction between the LMC and the facilitator was the payment of what was called “the stipend”. The LMC usually had a problem in paying the facilitator an allowance, because they would have liked to have one for themselves as well. The stipend, or incentive, that the facilitators got from their work was USD 20 per month and a facilitator would have a workload of two hours, three times a week. NAEAL considered this to be fair compensation in the rural area where local teachers earned USD 100 per month and a sack of rice cost USD 50.

However, the LMCs were not entirely trusted by the community members either. In preparation for the FRC evaluation (CDRA 2013), NAEAL staff and I visited four communities and interviewed learners, facilitators, LMC members, and people that were not involved in the literacy circles. We asked them to give their view on what sorts of questions should be included in the upcoming evaluation. Many of the questions concerning the LMC were about what the LMC had done to support the literacy circle group and to follow up on learning results. Another aspect was the payment of the facilitator's incentive and if the LMC had paid it and how much had been paid. So clearly the rather small amount of money that was involved raised suspicions and jealousies within the communities.

All in all, the questions that different groups wished to have in the evaluation showed a tendency towards control and demands for accountability in relation to the members of the literacy circles and the facilitators. The questions addressed to learners were concerned with the benefits accrued from the literacy circle and learning results. Tests were also requested. The questions to facilitators probed further about the learners, their attendance and progress, and about the atmosphere in the literacy circle. Respectively, the learners were asked about the facilitator's skills to teach in a way that the learners understood the contents of the lessons. When probed on what they would like to ask NAEAL or the Ministry of Education, the main question was about the continuation of the activities and the possibility to have a level 2 programme within the community. Quite many of the interviewees also asked why NAEAL had chosen to come to their community. So there seemed to be some confusion as to how the literacy circle had been started in the first place. (Evaluation questions from the communities, 30 November–2 December 2012)

As can be seen from the above, there were various groups within the community that had different interests and stakes when it comes to a literacy intervention. The facilitators got some financial benefits and gained some prestige for the facilitation of the study circle. Members of the LMC probably gained some prestige and could broaden their influence and power within the community.

Other actors that did gain financially from these activities were the local community-based organizations (CBO), which in some cases were contracted to implement parts of projects, or for example, for the monitoring of a literacy circle. The selected CBO as such did not necessarily represent the community, since it could be made of individuals that earned their living by engaging with the CBO and conducting its work in the communities. During my field visits, I observed the interaction between the communities and the CBOs. The concrete results of the work, such as the number of pit latrines built, were carefully counted and registered. In addition, the CBO representatives monitored the community by asking questions and double-checking the information from other community members. The CBO representatives were very active in approaching me with the various needs they had identified in the communities and making proposals on how these needs could be met.

7.2 NAEAL's managerial actions as a response to the legitimacy pressures from the communities

I will now discuss my findings following the idea of regulative, pragmatic, normative, and cultural-cognitive pressures of legitimacy stemming from the communities and the ways NAEAL responded to them.

7.2.1 Regulatory legitimacy: Memorandum of Understanding

Regulatory legitimacy demands usually revolve around legal requirements, such as permits or contracts. It may also include appropriate governance structures and practices, such as proper financial administration. NAEAL's clearest responses related to regulatory legitimacy were the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed with the LMC and a possible service contract with a local CBO.

The MoU was not a legal document, so the possibilities for the communities to enforce these commitments were mainly symbolic and limited to the actions described as "small accountability" in the previous section. As for NAEAL, "encouragement" was the main tool to be used in case there were problems with the fulfilment of the MoU by the community. This encouragement would include visits and discussions with the LMC and the facilitator. In fact, the enforcement of NAEAL's commitment to run a certain number of literacy circles in a number of communities seemed to come from the donors who closely followed the execution of their projects (see Chapter 6).

As described in section 7.1, NAEAL's engagement with a community included the setting up of an LMC. The LMC was supposed to have two representatives from the learners, elders (a man and a woman), youth representatives of both genders, and a representative of the Parent–Teacher Association (PTA). When forming the LMC, NAEAL advised the communities to include women and to avoid appointing community leaders. In Bomi and Cape Mount counties, which were one of the main areas for NAEAL's literacy training, the secret societies were on the average strong. According to the rules set by the back donor, chiefs and zoes could be part of the LMC, but they were not supposed to have voting power.

The MoU specified what was expected from the community and what was included and not included in the contract from NAEAL's side. NAEAL made an effort to inform the communities that the organization could not commit to more than what was stipulated in the MoU, that is, an extension to the programme or material or other benefits outside of the literacy circle were not feasible, because

NAEAL was conditioned by donor rules. The material assets provided by NAEAL for the literacy circle were modest. The main deliverable was "the Box", a box made of clear plastic that contained twenty learner's books and a manual for the facilitator, pencils, and some cardboard for making visualizations of letters and such. As for the community, it needed to commit human resources for the LMC, find a facilitator and the learners as well as offer a space for the gatherings.

Although such a MoU sounds like a perfect way to list the responsibilities of both parties, there remains the question of whom the LMC really represented. The Committee had a representation of different groups from the community ranging from learners to PTA representatives and elders, but it was very difficult for outsiders, especially for donor representatives or a researcher, to know what actually happened within the community and how the power relations between different groups worked.

In some instances, a CBO functioned as an implementer to NAEAL. This relationship was formalized with a standard legal contract that was binding for both parties and it stated the roles and responsibilities of the partners. These contracts included the transfer of money to the CBO and targets that it had to meet and NAEAL would supervise and monitor the CBO's work.

To sum up, the MoU signed between NAEAL and the community-elected LMC could be seen as a manifestation of regulative legitimacy. However, the MoU was not legally binding, and it is questionable if the LMC represented the community. In case a CBO was contracted to execute the programme or parts of it, a service contract was signed. In that case, the CBO did not present the community either but worked as a sub-contractor for NAEAL. In principle, there was no way for the community to present regulatory legitimacy demands towards NAEAL.

I now turn to the pragmatic legitimacy demands and the respective managerial responses by NAEAL, which might help to better understand the reasons for communities to welcome an adult education intervention and a literacy circle into the community.

7.2.2 Pragmatic legitimacy: literacy results and prospects for economic gain and contacts

Pragmatic legitimacy demands and pressures usually revolve around the actual benefits an organization provides, in this case, for the community. These include being able to respond to the expectations for services and other kinds of possible benefits that the involvement of an outside actor might bring with itself to the community. NAEAL's most obvious service for the community was the provision of adult literacy. However, the communities seemed to have expectations for other material and economic gains, as well as for a continued relationship of reciprocity with the organization.

The stated goals of the adult literacy programme were basic literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge of basic life skills and community participation (NAEAL 2011b). Many activities that could be considered as NAEAL's responses to the community's expectations of service provision were involved in setting up and running an adult literacy circle. Firstly, NAEAL mobilized the community to set up an LMC and to find the learners for the literacy circle. Then NAEAL provided the facilitator with training in the use of the learner's manual and how to conduct the classes in a participatory manner with respect for the learners. On-the-job guidance was offered to the facilitator during monitoring visits and a refresher course halfway through the project. The LMC was offered leadership training and support in running the literacy circle and resolving possible conflicts. The material benefits included the learning materials and a twenty-dollar monthly subsidy for the facilitator and possibly some improvements for the hut that served as a classroom.

Going through the facilitator's manual (NAEAL 2011a) shows that the nine-month course in adult literacy was set out to provide basic skills in English and numeracy in everyday situations and to provide some basic life skills and knowledge on how to participate in one's community. The learners and the facilitator sat in a circle so that everyone was able to see each other's faces and it was easy to hear what others were saying. Significant emphasis was put on listening skills, helping each other, and allowing everyone to speak. During each session, the facilitator would read a short text that would describe the functioning of a literacy circle or something related to the theme of the lesson. After that, the group discussed the issues presented.

The English expressions used in the manual and the study circle were very basic because English was a second language to the participants. In the past NAEAL offered the programme in local languages but learners were not interested in writing and reading in their own dialect (Interview 21N1, 5 March 2012, NAEAL Field monitor). English is the official language of the country, and it carries a certain prestige. It is the language of the elite, but also the language of the outside world that comes to the communities via radio broadcasts, music, newspapers, and visitors. However, poor English language skills might hinder the possibility for critical engagement with learning that is aspired to within the Freirean thinking which lies behind NAEAL's literacy work. It has been noted in other contexts as well that English, as a high-status language, becomes a means to acquire social power and status (Egbo 2000, 32) instead of effective learning (Robinson-Pant 2008, 183).

The lessons covered the alphabet, how to combine letters into short words, pronunciation, numbers from 1 to 100, and basic calculations. In addition, words related to the body parts, to family, house, quarters, community, and the market were introduced. The basic life skills sections emphasized health education, and how to avoid and treat malaria and diarrhoea. As part of this, knowledge on how to build and maintain an ecological pit latrine and how to clean the dishes were provided and discussed. Two sessions were dedicated to family and community agreements and to the discussion on how and by whom decisions were made and whether any changes would be needed in reaching agreements.

Because many of the learners had no background in school, the learning started from how to hold a pen. In the literacy circle, the participants started to learn the alphabet and to trace letters. People were especially proud of being able to write and sign their own name so that they did not have to use thumb signing anymore. During the nine-month study circle, it was possible to learn some basic spelling and reading and to count to 100 and do some simple maths. This helped people to manage their money in, for example, the market and to use cell phones. Learners' self-confidence was boosted as they learned some basic English and were able to introduce themselves in English. The English language also eased communication with people from other ethnic groups. As the study circles were participatory and room was given to all participants, women learned to speak in front of other people, which also made it easier for them to participate in town meetings or outside the village.

The level of ambition in regards to outcomes and impacts attached to adult literacy circles by donors, and even by NAEAL, was overwhelming. Although the stated goals were about basic skills, donors, evaluators, and even NAEAL staff expected the programme to deliver higher-level developmental outcomes. During the Monitoring and Evaluation workshop in March 2012 (NAEAL 2012a), NAEAL staff used a tree metaphor (Table 7 and Figure 3) to show how they understood the cause-and-effect relationships of adult education. They described the effects of their work in changes that promote economic and social development and that empower the learners on a personal level. All of these changes would ultimately lead to happiness.

TABLE 7 We do skills training to increase happiness

Economic development	Development on a personal level	Social development
Wealth Economic and social empowerment Increased employment Increased income	Assertiveness Positive attitude Self-independence Sound judgement Behavioural change Informed decision making Self-esteem Confidence	Peace and security Reduction in crime Contribution to development Poverty reduction Ownership
HAPPINESS		

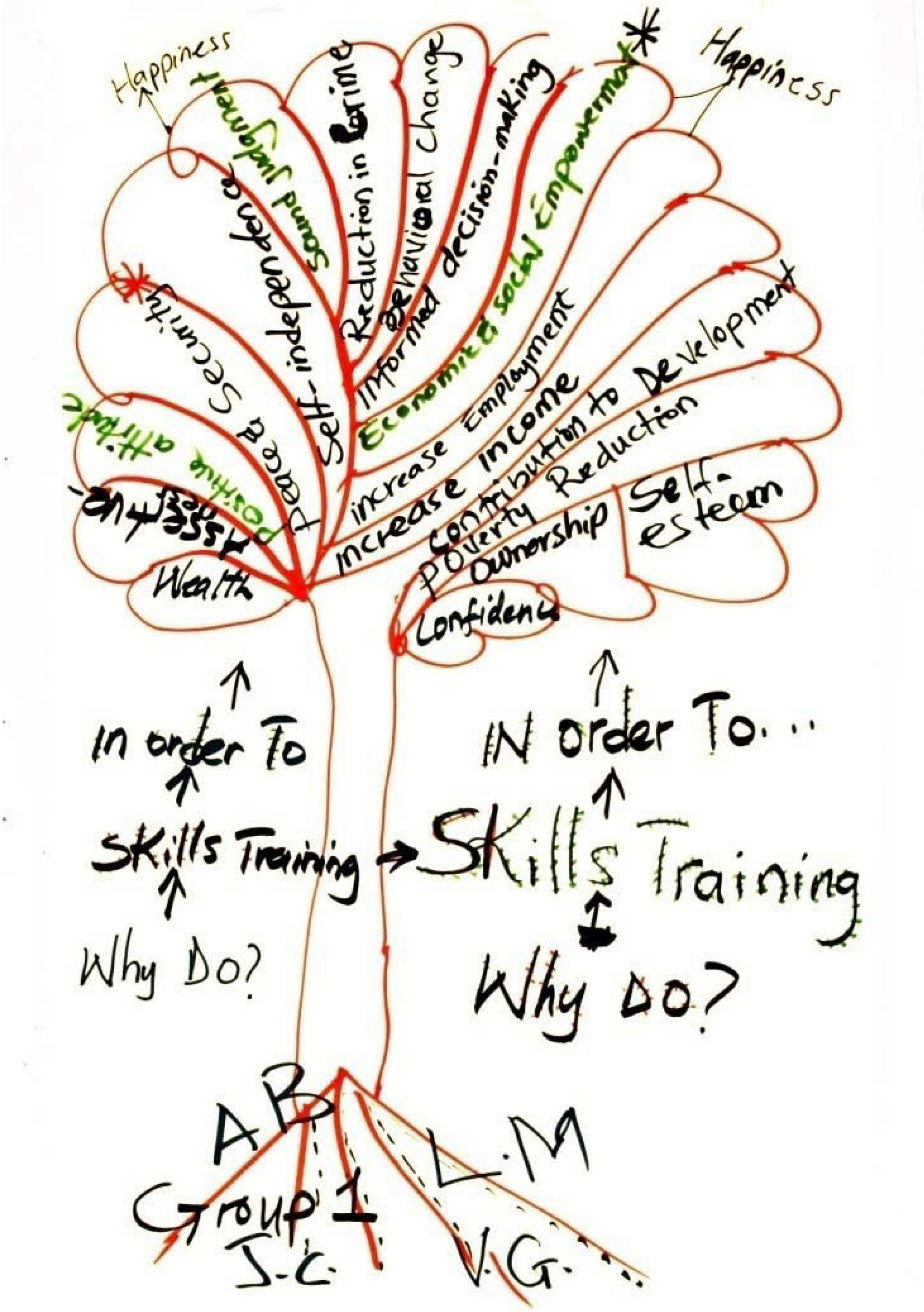

FIGURE 3 The effects of skills training according to NAEAL staff

Source: NAEAL 2012a

Evaluations (CDRA 2013; NARDA 2008) found evidence that the programme had empowered both men and women, but especially women's participation in domestic and village affairs had improved. Parents were able to assist their children with schoolwork and to follow up on their marks while some were teaching their spouses or neighbours to read. Instead of increased intra-family violence, improved relationships were reported within families. In village meetings, the newly literate people spoke up and were no longer dominated by the more formally educated. The listening skills that people learned in the study circles and the capacities that the LMCs gained in managing the activities contributed to increased harmony in the communities, which were seen as signs of reconciliation and peace in the communities.

As the first level of the literacy course did not reach very far, the communities usually wanted to see a continuation of the programme. As has been noted by, among others, Bhola and Valdivieso Gómez (2008, 7), sustaining the literacy skills that have been learned requires that the context, that is, the prevailing political and economic structures, are supportive of continued literacy. Otherwise, the learner does not have the possibility to use his / her abilities. The need for more support is a common feature of development cooperation because it is not easy to leave things halfway after the initial investment. The communities looked for NAEAL or the Ministry of Education to step in, but both of them were constrained by the availability of funding from the donors.

Communities' expectations for material benefits did not, however, stop with the literacy circle. The results of an adult literacy intervention discussed above are part of the donor's and also of NAEAL's rhetoric about the benefits of these interventions for the communities. However, it seems the communities themselves were looking for other kinds of benefits as well. That is, any kinds of material and economic benefits that could be derived from the literacy circles, and of the flow of visitors connected to them, seemed to be central to the different groups within the communities.

As soon as the literacy circle was starting its activities, in fact, while the Box containing the books and writing utensils was opened, people started to express wishes to have more material benefits from the project. These included masking tape for the cardboard, a concrete floor for the hut that functioned as the classroom, or kerosene for lamps to be able to study during the dark hours. Later on, having a second phase of the programme after the nine-month course would be requested because that would be essential to enhance the recently acquired skills.

In response to these demands, the Finnish Refugee Council, which usually adhered to its policy of not providing more material assets, in some cases gave small support to renovate existing facilities if suitable space for studies could not be identified (NARDA 2010). Once the request for kerosene for lamps was accepted and provided. The provided kerosene was supposed to last for the meetings over the nine-month literacy circle but was used up within a month.

The differences between donor programmes also boosted the expectations. For example, within the Bahn refugee camp, the NAEAL study circle convened in a hut that had no walls and muddy floors. Next door, another donor's educational programme worked in classrooms built with brick and that had tables and chairs, which raised questions and expectations for upgrading the learning environment for the literacy circle as well.

Communities expected continued economic gains from NAEAL, or at least some sort of opportunities for them. Knowingly or not, NAEAL responded to these expectations by providing a flow of people that could be approached with requests for support. This way NAEAL responded to the communities' wish to attract new patrons.

As my visits were mediated by NAEAL or FRC, and being a white person, put me into a position of a prospective donor. I was introduced to a lot of problems that could have been solved with economic support. The very first request was for a well that cost 3500 USD. World Vision had built several wells in the community but not one of them was functioning anymore.

> Yes we intend to ask for another pump if anybody coming to the committee we will ask. We have made the request to central government but they had not say anything about it yet they have not come they only told us they will come but nobody had not come. One time one man came and took the number of the pump and carry it since he went he has not come back. I don't even know his name it been about a year now since he left. (Interview 011CM1, 28 February 2012, LMC representative)

One of the motivations for learning to read and write expressed in one of the LMCs I visited was "to be able to write a letter to an NGO". This and the above extract show that the community was placing its hope more on NGOs than on the central government. NGOs had been the implementers of donor projects and therefore the communities had gotten used to seeing that it was NGOs, not the government, which were providing infrastructure and some services for the communities.

In the case of the communities in Liberia, expectations of contacts and patrons in anticipation of possible economic benefits were attached to the literacy intervention. The communities had been in contact with donors and they had learned to play the aid game. Therefore, they accepted the services on offer and hoped that other benefits could be reaped out of the official programmes. These observations are in line with, for example, Watkins and Swidler's (2012) findings that people in communities have their own intentions and for those purposes any source of assistance is good. In this case, adult literacy and women's empowerment function as code words for material help. Various scholars (Ferguson 1994; Olivier de Sardan 2005; Kelsall 2008) have emphasized that the efforts to sidetrack development interventions indicate the real needs and aspirations of the people. Based on my observations, therefore, possible economic gains and concrete material benefits were the underlying needs of these communities.

In summary, NAEAL responded to the pragmatic legitimacy pressures from communities by providing a programme in adult literacy that improved the literacy and life skills of those that participated in the literacy circles and management skills of the members of the LMC. It also provided small material and economic benefits, as well as a flow of visitors that could be approached with requests for support.

7.2.3 Normative legitimacy: playing the aid game

Normative legitimacy is gained by producing results with practices that are societally valued. It is also about structures that are commonly attached to the particular range of actors and, for example, the traits of the leadership or personnel. (Brinkerhoff 2005.)

Because the communities have been in contact with non-governmental organizations before, they already have an idea of what can be expected from these organizations when it comes to the goods and services provided, as well as techniques and procedures used, or how these organizations function structurally. It is understood in the communities that an NGO will be restricted by donor conditions and that to secure the funds or services, certain functions are expected from the community for the flow of resources to continue. Burchardt (2013) discusses how the relationships between faith-based organizations (FBO) and their beneficiaries evolve in HIV/AIDS projects in South Africa. She notes that beneficiaries are willing to perform the roles expected by donors in order to secure continued funding for the organization and, ultimately, for themselves. As a result, people represent themselves as needing continued support, they participate in the activities that are provided, and the FBO obtains figures and other evidence they can present to their donors.

Following Burchardt (2013), I claim that the communities started to play along with the aid game so that they and NAEAL would be successful in securing continued donor support. The communities that NAEAL worked with engaged in the aid game in various ways. Firstly, new structures were set up within the community following donor demands. Then the community members engaged in practices that were introduced by the development interventions, such as meetings, participatory workshops, constructing pit latrines, and engaging in new forms of farming. The communities also took part in the provision of information for donor monitoring and evaluation needs. Finally, the communities engaged in different forms of hospitality for visitors and provided, for example, images and stories for donor fundraising. In return, NAEAL employed field staff that was apt for working with the communities and could secure their collaboration.

For example, the LMC that was described at the beginning of this chapter is a new structure that was introduced as a requirement for adult literacy intervention. The bigger and more complicated the programme, the more committees would be established. In a large forestry programme several new structures were put in place. There would be a Cassava Processing Group, a Commercial Palm Oil Production Group, Community Forest Management Body, and a group for the Joint Forest Management Plan. All of these groups received some capacity building, perhaps a small amount of money, or an investment in machinery.

> Yes new structure. This structure was draw under this particular program...So in one community you will find CPG, CPOP, CFMB, JFMP. You go on the other side you will see the same. So everybody working are the same member but at a different location...So we have this small grant that was given to them in terms of machine, they give them some call Freedom mill that have to do with palm oil. They produce palm oil yea. The communities use that machine to produce palm oil. (Interview 23N1, 6 March 2012, NAEAL Project Coordinator)

The LMC, and many other similar structures, were supposed to have meetings, keep minutes of these meetings, keep track of money trusted to them, and monitor the facilitator's work and the advancement of the learners. The mere literacy circle and the way of sitting in a circle and taking turns in speaking was a new form of engagement in the community. Because these practices were new, the LMCs and other groups needed "encouragement", and were given training and advice in how to organize and conduct meetings, record minutes, and settle disputes.

As noted by Swidler (2009, 193), NGOs are the main actors in transmitting institutional models from the global level to the local contexts. One of these models is the idea of participation. Donors are keen to establish committees and groups within communities, thinking these structures will help the communities work together after a country's history of conflict. These groups are also meant to be spaces for practicing skills that are then meant to be transferable to holding, for example, the government or foreign companies, accountable to the communities. Most importantly, for the donors, they are a sign of local commitment and ownership of a programme. Despite the many problems identified with donor induced participation, such as being tokenistic (Cooke & Kothari 2001), a distorted "sham ritual" (Najam 1996) or an expression of tyranny as in unjust use of power (Hickey & Mohan 2004), they are still very much alive within the field of development cooperation.

As outlined in Chapter 4, some donor-induced structures in Liberia are new and try to challenge the old structures, but other donor programmes strengthen the structures that were becoming obsolete during the war, such as the *sandes* and *poros* of secret societies as well as the traditional chiefs (Fuest 2010). A feature that emerges from my case study was that the various donor structures created space especially for the men in the villages at the cost of the women. I discuss this in more detail in section 7.4.

Provision of information for monitoring and evaluation was something where NAEAL needed the communities' engagement and collaboration to fulfil the monitoring and evaluation requirements of its different donor agencies. As explained in Chapter 6 on donor practices, the donors did their utmost to protect themselves by creating elaborate monitoring and evaluation systems, resorting to payment-by-results, collecting success stories, and finally maintaining the possibility to withdraw abruptly from the cooperation.

A special feature of monitoring was the control that was extended to the learners within the literacy circles. As can be recalled from the previous sections, most of the learners in the literacy groups were women. Many people checked the women's workbooks. The facilitator followed up and corrected their work.

The NAEAL field monitor would come and check the books and correct the mistakes. He would also monitor the facilitator's work and advise on issues that, according to the workbooks, had not been properly instructed. The donor monitoring officer visited the study circles and checked the books, and so did the NAEAL project coordinator. Then the LMC would check the attendance of the learners in the study circles, and so would the NAEAL field monitor, and the NAEAL programme coordinator, and the donor's project personnel that came by every now and then.

Field monitors usually had many literacy circles and communities they had to visit. They checked the attendance, the workbooks for progress, the general atmosphere in the study circle, and the work of the facilitator. In some programmes they had a motorbike to go to the villages, but anyhow the work was strenuous. Programme staff from Monrovia would come to collect the notes on attendance or they might be sent over the internet to the head office. Headcount and attendance of each literacy circle were entered into Excel sheets to verify the success rate of each study circle. The attendance reports were also sent through Google Docs to the donor's resident representative, who would discuss it with NAEAL personnel every week. A special visit was be made to those circles that seemed to be having problems with advancing according to the set schedule.

Especially the communities that were within easy reach from Monrovia hosted a stream of visitors. When donor representatives, or people hired by them, visited the communities, the learners showed up to be counted and to show their books so that their progress could be verified. At least once a year someone from the donor's headquarters would also come by. The donor's press officer that collected material for fundraising purposes would make another visit. The press officer would be looking for human interest success stories of how a certain intervention had changed a poor person's life. For the visitors, these visits gave a sense of being able to verify the activities and their results on the ground with their own eyes. Despite the multiplicity of reporting that was done, personal engagement was needed to create trust on the existence of the projects and their results.

Field staff with special skills and attitudes was key for NAEAL's ability to working with the communities. The structural differentiation of staff (Greenwood et al. 2011, 354) per legitimacy audience that was found in the case of the Ministry of Education and the donors continued in the communities as well. The professional qualities that were needed from field staff included strong mobilization skills that meant being able to connect with people and to build relationships, knowing how to inspire and motivate people to participate, and being a good facilitator and trainer. Ideally, the field staff spoke the local language and lived nearby in order to be approachable to the community members.

These above-mentioned skills are part of the facilitation that is the technology used to engage with people and communities. The ultimate rationale of facilitation is to change people's behaviour while at the same time respecting their views and motivating them to be active and self-organizing in solving their own problems (Kontinen et al. 2015, 108-110). The paradox with facilitation is that while it emphasizes people's knowledge and active participation, even empowerment, donors have already written down the solutions in project documents. For example, the solution provided by NAEAL is adult education and literacy.

In conclusion, normative legitimacy pressures from the communities were matched by NAEAL with field staff that were skilled facilitators and that had the abilities to broker between the communities and the field of development cooperation. The community engagement followed the local understandings of patrimonialism, as the communities engaged in various activities, such as setting up new structures and participating in various events and practices, providing information, and touring visitors, to ensure that NAEAL would be able to fulfil its donor requirements.

7.2.4 Cultural-cognitive legitimacy: we sit and we talk

Cultural-cognitive legitimacy is based on cognition and on the cultural appropriateness of an organization, which makes its existence understandable for the legitimacy audience (Scott 2014). Prevailing social values and norms dictate the acceptance of an organization and whether it can be taken-for-granted in its context.

In the case of the communities, NGOs are more and more common, and the communities are learning what can be assumed when such an organization enters the community. However, the NGOs are also expected to respect the norms and values that prevail in the local context. This includes, for example, forming relationships based on trust and reciprocity and appropriate ways of communication. NAEAL's field staff was again key in building and maintaining these relationships.

The will to engage with trust and reciprocity as a precondition for a functioning relationship came very strongly from the people that I interviewed. A trustful relationship was considered to be based on being honest with each other. In the academic literature, trust has been referred to as the willingness to take a risk and to be vulnerable in a relationship where one expects the other party to perform important actions, while the trustor does not have ways to ensure that these actions take place (Mayer et al. 1995). As mentioned in section 7.1.2, the communities may have had disappointing experiences with development actors in the past, and therefore NAEAL needed to make an extra effort to regain their trust.

Face-to-face relations are an important ingredient for building trust (Mawdsley et al 2005). This became clear when discussing with NAEAL staff the differences in communication with donors and with the communities. With the communities and in Liberia in general, face-to-face interaction was the basis for trustful relationships.

> Him (NAEAL field staff)? Very fine. Each time I get problem I contact him contact you there is a means of solving it we solve it. Any complain I get I always get to him, if it

mean to call him by phone I call him, if I have to walk I walk to him. He walk here and we two sit down and talk to them. Our working relationship is very good. At time even though I don't call him he take his motorbike he come to see he say what happen. I say no problem that's why I don't call you. (Interview 011CM1, 28 February 2012, Literacy Management Committee representative)

Because trust was created by face-to-face interaction, the fact that the facilitators lived within the community was an essential ingredient in the success of the projects. The presence of the person facilitated informal contact with the community members and made her or him part of the community and more accessible to the community members. Problem-solving was also best done through face-to-face interaction. In her study of Liberian NGO managers, Okker (2016) noted that it was advisable to tackle problems as soon as possible, since this was considered to be part of a mutually beneficial relationship where the parties look for each other's backs.

Having committed staff that could relate to the community members was key to NAEAL's success in the communities. The field staff took care of the organization's legitimacy on delivering results on the community level. The people above them depended on them for results and information. The field staff consisted of people that thrived on working with community people and did not care for city life. Being close to the community absorbed the field staff into a patronage relationship with the community members. He (the field monitors are usually men) lived in someone's house paying rent, he had a motorbike and a regular salary, which was much more than what the people in the community had. In addition to increased salaries, the field workers' own dreams also included the possibility to perhaps move on to work as a project coordinator in the future. These dreams were fuelled with the increased self-confidence that had been gained in working at the intersection of the community and NAEAL, and the field of development cooperation. (Discussion with a NAEAL field coordinator at Bahn camp, Field diary 2 December 2013)

The field staff spoke the local language and functioned as gatekeepers, brokers, and translators between the communities and NAEAL and the various outside visitors, such as myself. He would take NAEAL staff from Monrovia and the accompanying donor representatives around in the locality, which signalled to the community members that he was well connected to the outside world and powerful people. This endowed him with power and social control that was combined with local knowledge and the expertise and professional norms of the field of development cooperation. (See also Ebrahim & Weisband 2007, 17.)

Another feature of NAEAL's relationship with the communities was the expectation of reciprocity in the relationship. Although the literacy service could be seen as "a free good" there were several ways the communities contributed to the literacy programmes. These aspects were discussed during the M&E workshop in 2012 with NAEAL staff members (NAEAL 2012a). The contributions that staff saw coming from the communities were, for example, ideas and information, support and cooperation, and the success stories that gave NAEAL best practice cases and a good reputation. The staff also recognized that the communities provided NAEAL with the legitimacy for its work. The communities also provided concrete input. The LMCs did part of the monitoring work and reported to NAEAL, and the community gave also feedback and recommendations. The communities provided venues and workforce because many of the facilitators, trainers and employees came originally from the communities. Another factor that was mentioned by NAEAL staff was that the communities provided security for NAEAL staff when they were out in the communities.

In summary, the communities expected that NAEAL staff behaved in culturally appropriate ways in their dialogue and interaction with the community. NAEAL, but also the communities, invested in building a relationship based on trust and reciprocity. NAEAL's major asset in its relationship with the communities were the members of the field staff that were close to the communities, both physically and culturally, and that could win the support of the community members and get them to participate in the project activities.

7.3 Emerging managerial strategies: brokering between different contexts

In NAEAL's engagement with the communities, the cultural-cognitive expectations play an important role, and the managerial strategies that NAEAL uses to fulfil the various legitimacy pressures derive from the local understandings and logics. First, *conforming* to what is expected from a local NGO entering a community is accomplished by *brokerage* between the donors and the communities. Secondly, establishing relationships with the communities absorbs NAEAL into a *patronage relationship*, which is the way to organize social life in Liberia. Therefore, patronage implies a managerial strategy that could be called conforming to local cultural-cognitive expectations. Thirdly, in return, the communities engage in various activities that are needed to *co-create responses to donor demands* that are important for NAEAL as well as for the continued support to the communities.

Brokerage

The first step is to broker the organization's way into the community. When entering a new community, NAEAL staff used mobilization and persuasion skills to convince the community to take part in a new intervention. The interventions had usually been designed by donors and might be part of larger undertakings in various parts of Liberia and even in various countries. NAEAL's work in the interphase of donors and communities can be called *brokerage* (Mosse & Lewis 2006; Mosse 2005) as they explained the donor's plans in a way that was comprehensible to communities, stirred up their interest towards the intervention, including mending the disappointments created by previous donors and convincing the communities to do all that was required by the donors.

Simultaneously, NAEAL eased the donor representatives' work by liaising with the communities and explaining their views to the donors. As Bierschenk et al. (2002) put it, brokerage is needed to bring order and legitimacy because of the co-existing but different rationalities, interests and meanings. It is needed for the continuation of funding flows and successes.

Brokerage is a double role because it entails switching and mediating between donor logics and local understandings. A broker needs various competencies to be efficient. These can be organizational, linguistic, presentational, and relational (Mosse & Lewis 2006, 18), depending on whom they need to convince to give their support for the intervention. In the case of NAEAL, the staff that worked in the intersection of the communities and NAEAL's Monrovia office came originally from the communities and therefore were familiar with the local way of life, customs, and language. They were able to inspire the community members through their mobilization and facilitation skills and to maintain their interest through the project cycle and engage them in the various activities needed for the projects. In return, people would give their time for meetings, training events, literacy circles, host visitors, and provide information for various kinds of purposes.

Patronage

The communities welcomed NAEAL and in return for their participation, the communities were looking for concrete benefits, such as services or small investments. Even if the contents of the specific intervention were not ideal for the community, they engaged with it in the hope of having possibilities to side-track the intervention towards something more useful, meet people, and form connections that might bring some benefits in the future. Different groups, such as the LMC, the local CBO, or the facilitators, were looking for different kinds of benefits from this engagement.

NAEAL and its staff members were absorbed into patronage relationships that were based on relationships of reciprocity to mobilize resources for different purposes. The rules of reciprocity are a combination of moral obligations and emotional attachment, and they go back to the kinship-based social organization (Smith 2003, 706). An important part of "the accountability of patrimonialism" (Leonardi 2004) or the "moral economy of corruption" (Olivier de Sardan 1999) is that the patron is expected to redistribute the resources that they have accumulated with the help of their clients. In traditional society, a good chief would take care of his people and redistribute his wealth back to his kin or clients, possibly during rituals that also showed their sacred powers. Therefore, according to the local understanding, a bad patron is not the corrupt one, but the one that does not redistribute his wealth to others.

Patron-client relationships are a common way to organize social and economic life also in Liberia (Utas 2008). People often used the phrase "You scratch my back, and I will scratch yours" to describe the way to get things done in Liberia. Any favor done for someone else comes with the expectation that it will be returned in the future.

When asked how the communities monitored NAEAL, the respondent laughed because people saw themselves as clients of the NGO, not as patrons in this relationship. The communities would exercise "small accountability" and pose a lot of questions to NAEAL and other visitors, follow closely all visits and express their dissatisfaction if, for example, there was a long break without a visit to the community. Once trust had been built, the expectation was that the relationship would be for the long term and that NAEAL would look after the community and its needs. The question from various community members towards NAEAL was often the following: "Why can't we hear from you people when the program ended?" Because the relationship was limited by the availability of time and other resources allocated by the donors, NAEAL was destined to become a bad patron in the end.

While the relationship lasted, NAEAL made significant efforts to deliver a good quality product, be it in the form of literacy classes, eco pit latrines, or forest protection schemes. They also provided the communities with a flow of visitors that gave some possibilities to find new patrons. As Rossi (2006) notes, there is always something that can be gained from development cooperation interventions and outside contacts, and the recipients have their own strategies to exploit these possibilities. Outside contacts, opportunities for extra income or prestige give the participants a possibility to enhance their own patron-client relations. This also explains why communities choose to engage with the interventions and reinterpret them for their own advantage instead of resisting them. (Rossi 2006.) However, as Heaton Shrestha (2006) noted in her case study on Nepal, the level of participation required from communities may be more than the benefits provided by the project.

Co-creation of responses to donor demands

Burchardt (2013) followed faith-based organizations and their beneficiaries in South Africa, and she concludes that patronage and the logic of clientelism is a way to gain and maintain legitimacy within the relationship. She notes that different forms of legitimacy and legitimacy derived from different audiences are co-dependent. Therefore, the FBOs and their clients engage in fulfilling donor expectations to ensure continued funding for the organization and a continuation of the relationship of patronage.

I will call this *a strategy of co-creation of responses to donor demands*, and both brokerage and patronage together pave the way for it. As the communities positioned themselves as clients in relation to NAEAL, they went along in the various activities involved in the intervention and start to co-create together with NAEAL the different artefacts, practices, and structures that were needed for legitimating the work done in the communities for the donors. As was seen in the previous chapter, various new structures, such as committees, were set up in the communities. New practices, including literacy circles and facilitation, were introduced. To fulfil donor demands for monitoring and evaluation, many new artefacts were produced. These ranged from lists of participants to photographs of learners' books and the success stories gathered for publicity work in the North.

These served as evidence to donors that a certain number of people had been reached and that the intervention had made an impact in the lives of these people. This evidence enhanced both NAEAL's and the donor's legitimacy among their other legitimacy audiences.

In summary, NAEAL acted as a *broker* between donors and communities by paving the way for the interventions in the communities and disseminating information to the donors. NAEAL was drawn into a *patronage* relationship with the communities that were expecting continuing benefits in return for their engagement in *co-creating responses to the various donor demands*.

7.4 Empowering women?

In Liberia at the beginning of the 2010s, women's empowerment seemed to be something that provided legitimacy for various stakeholders. Donors pushed for it because it was a major fad within the field of development cooperation, and with a female president in power, enhancing women's empowerment was a legitimate goal for the local entities as well. Therefore, it is relevant to explore more closely what this meant in practice and whether this goal was reached.

The matter of women's empowerment becomes complicated when the donors push for their agendas and do not consider the local context. The general view of development cooperation is to assume that women are oppressed victims that need liberation through Western-style structures and ideologies (Mohanty et al. 1991; Mohanty 2003). The concept of empowerment itself has become a development buzzword that is being used by international banks and other multinational organizations and that has been stripped of its radical, countercultural, and anti-capitalist meaning (Hickel 2014, 1362). Cornwall (2018) refers to the current use of the term as "empowerment lite", referring to the current emphasis on unleashing women and girls' potential for economic development while at the same time keeping them within the existing gender and social norms.

Liberians come from various ethnic groups that have different traditions. In many Liberian contexts, women have traditionally been rather respected and strong. Especially motherhood is a source of power and respect in Liberia. (Moran 2012, 58-59.) Therefore, for example, adolescent girls with children are not only victims as seen by donors, but they consider themselves as respected mothers and adults.

Although women and young men have been in a subordinate position in relation to male elders, women have had rights over other family members and collective resources. They have also possessed collective power to voice their concerns and to check on those in power through the use of supernatural powers, legitimate violence, boycotts, or marches out of the village. Women have also had power over junior male and female family members. In other words, women have not been considered powerless. (Moran 2012, 53-54.)

Women's roles in agricultural production, processing food, and marketing have been valued. Going to the market has been customary for women, and, for example, during the civil wars, women could cross enemy lines and make market transactions with women from other factions. Traditionally, women have been respected as breadwinners and economic actors and the earnings they received belonged to the women themselves. (Abramowitz & Moran 2012.)

Despite the rhetoric of empowerment, it is not uncommon for donor programmes to see women mainly as caregivers and responsible for the wellbeing of children, families, and the community. As already explained, women have been attached to much broader roles within Liberian society. However, the village elders picked up quickly on the donor talk, saying that women's literacy skills were "good for the children", as women could check children's homework, take them to the health centre and understand the instructions given to them regarding the medicines and other procedures. Women could also use their literacy and numeracy skills for trading their products or, for example, to help their fathers in keeping their shop.

Given the Liberian context, most of the learners in the literacy circles were women. As described in section 7.2.2 under pragmatic legitimacy, evaluations reported positive results for increased harmony in the communities and increased participation of women in common affairs. The results presented in the evaluations are in line with the evidence from other parts of the world. According to Bhola and Valdivieso Gómez (2008), women that have taken part in literacy classes report an increased sense of self-worth and self-esteem accompanied by feelings of personal freedom and self-sufficiency. Being able to participate in literacy classes outside of the house changed the social world of the women and had effects on the family and community level (Bhola & Valdivieso Gómez 2008).

To reach all these higher-level outcomes, literacy is not, however, a sufficient condition (Robinson-Pant 2004). The above-mentioned results could be contributed to the ways the literacy circles were conducted and to the improved listening and speaking skills of the participants. There was no national test for adult literacy in Liberia, so the actual learning outcomes were not known. In preparation for the NAEAL–FRC evaluation (CDRA 2013), a small test was conducted in some of the FRC-financed literacy circles. The findings were that one-third of the learners learned well, one-third at the average level, and one-third did not make much progress during the literacy circles and may have also dropped out from the programme. This means that there is also the possibility of disempowerment embedded in the programme. The learner might find the letters as well as new ways of thinking introduced by the facilitator difficult.

Literacy programmes have been observed to even increase the shame caused by illiteracy (Street 2004). One of my informants told me an anecdote of his uncle who always carried two pens sticking out of his pocket to give an impression that he was an educated man although he was not able to read or write. In the Bahn camp, one of the literacy circle participants was the leader of the camp's women. She was a remarkably charismatic person, but seemingly ashamed of the fact that she could not read. (Field diary, 2 December 2013) As

Street (2004) shows, there are cases when perfectly capable women who have been active within their communities, have taken care of family businesses, or have engaged in paid labour, have lost their self-esteem because they have been labelled as illiterate. In many cases, these women have had various means of using literacy and numeracy in their environment, but when literacy is taken as a measure of ability and knowledge, they become powerless.

One of the programmes that had women's empowerment as a stated goal was the World Bank financed Economic Empowerment for Adolescent Girls (EPAG) programme that worked in various countries, of which Liberia was one. The programme combined public donor funding with private foundation grants and in 2012 the Liberian part of this programme was financed by the Government of Denmark and the Nike Foundation.

The Nike Foundation's "Girl Effect" brand has been very influential in setting the international development agenda for adolescent girls as having untapped potential that can end poverty for themselves, their families, communities, countries, and the world (Hickel 2014). Through its partnerships with the World Bank and DFID or Nordic governments, the Nike Foundation has established itself as a major actor within the field of development cooperation. Its way of collecting information on "universal indicators" across various countries has started to affect the production of knowledge on adolescent girls worldwide. Moeller (2013) argues that it had resulted in the invisibilization of the actual lives of young women while justifying counting, tracking, and mapping of "Third World" girls' lives in a way that would not be acceptable in, for example, the US because the indicators are concerned with, in addition to levels of education, intimate sexual information.

The programme is being implemented in African, Latin American, and Asian countries, and the pressure to meet the "universal indicators" is being felt in various locations (Moeller 2013). The EPAG project was implemented through various intermediary organizations, usually international NGOs that had their offices in Monrovia, that then hired local NGOs such as NAEAL to take care of the life skills and business training.

To motivate girls to join the programme, loudspeaker announcements were made in the community to inform them of this opportunity. Then the interested girls would send an application or come in person. According to the coordinator, the chiefs were not part of the selection process, but EPAG chose the participants. Their names, addresses, and telephone numbers were written down so they could be contacted later. This was important especially if the girl did not show up for classes and the assistant had to go look for her. Usually, the problem in these cases was the sickness of the girl or her child, or the fact that she had to work to earn an income.

The pressure for the project to succeed was obvious. The quality of training was secured by employing teachers with university degrees. Girls would be picked up from home if they did not show up because the implementer had to meet the 75 percent assistance rate. The girls were also paid for participating. For each day they participated in the programme, they received a dollar and a half.

This was to cover the opportunity cost of not being able to go to the market to sell their produce during the course. Another requirement for the implementers was that by the end of the programme, 75 percent of the girls would have a sustainable business with proper record keeping in place.

Part of the Girl Effect programming is to gather hard evidence on the workings of the programme's theory of change. Moeller (2013) claims that this practice makes the adolescent girls "research subjects in a social experiment". The EPAG programme in Liberia employed a foreign specialist in monitoring. He had designed a system he taught to the implementing agencies' staff so that they could insert the necessary data into the databases. First, there was a placement test to see the girls' level of reading and counting. The girls were divided into groups A, B, and C according to their reading and counting skills at the beginning of the intervention. Then each girls' advancement was tracked, and statistics made of how many would move from C to B to A. In addition to the academic skills, the placement in employment as well as the success of each small business was followed up on. Random spot checks were made by consultants hired by EPAG to ensure that the premises were clean, and that the teachers and learners were present. The implementing agencies were contacted if the indicators were not met and the intermediary implementers passed on the requirements to each sub-contractor. In addition to performance indicators, an impact evaluation was done every six months by an external group of consultants that probed both the girls and their relatives and friends on a number of issues.

Hickel (2014) claims that the individualistic ideal of a self-made businesswoman puts the participant in a position of precarity and risk. Although some girls or women may succeed, many do not. This will be seen as a personal failure, due to laziness or irresponsibility. The structural hindrances, such as low levels of schooling, lack of support from family and boyfriends, problems with childcare, health problems, and so on, are downplayed. The individualistic worldview also contrasts with the realities of the local contexts where safety nets are embedded in the communal kinship networks. (Hickel 2014.)

Within the EPAG programme, women's empowerment had been reduced to economic activities. The political meaning of the concept was no longer there, nor structural causes of poverty. The special programmes that target women as untapped potential for the market economy are driven by the individualistic liberal thinking of entrepreneurship that stresses the individual woman's and girl's efforts to take themselves, their families, and communities out of poverty (Grosser & van der Gaag 2013; Hickel 2014). Chant (2006, 206) calls this phenomenon the "feminization of responsibility and obligation".

This same phenomenon was present in the PROSPER programme in Nimba that was supposed to protect the nearby forests. To compensate for not being able to exploit the forests, the communities were to produce cassava and palm oil. All of the extra work caused by these activities was done by women while men would take part in the various committees and meetings because they were prohibited to hunt, cut leaves, and so on in the forest.

ANJA: The men are not allowed to hunt or cut leaves, what do they do?

> The men are chairman for this position and they go to lots of meeting. But the woman were they have the machine in the morning you see the women coming with their cassava bag. They do the farina, the big pot after they process they keep it under something, it dry and patch it in the big pot you see the women you don't see men. From there put it in the bag take it to market and get some good money out of it and support the family. (Interview 23N1, 6 March 2012, NAEAL Project Coordinator)

The discussion on women, gender, and the unequal relationships between genders within development started in the 1970s (Boserup 1970; Molyneux 1985; Moser 1993; Kabeer 1994), but not much seems to have changed on the ground if in the 2010s we can still find a development project that increases women's burden of labour while men sit and discuss. The donor in this case was USAID and the project was obviously gender blind, as expressed in development language. However, this situation was facilitated by the co-optation of the men in the communities and field staff, who were also men. The joining of mutual interests of donors and local men in the interventions increased women's workload without truly empowering them. This example shows the persistence of the norms that maintain gender inequality both within the field of development cooperation and in the local context. It also exemplifies the gap between policy and practice, between form and function, in development cooperation referred to as "decoupling" in organizational institutionalism. (See also Swiss & Ilonze 2021.)

7.5 Chapter conclusions

As Burchardt (2013) notes, different forms of legitimacy and legitimacy derived from different audiences are co-dependent. NAEAL's legitimacy towards donors and the Ministry of Education was dependent on its ability to work with the communities and the results derived from this engagement. One would think that this would position the communities as strong stakeholders and legitimacy audiences in relation to NAEAL. However, the communities positioned themselves more as clients in search of a patron along the lines of the local institution of patronage.

The differences between communities and internally meant that communities formed a heterogeneous legitimacy audience. Different groups had different stakes in the programmes, which meant that power struggles or jealousies occurred among the newly formed structures such as the LMC, facilitators, and learners as well as those not directly involved with a literacy circle, for example.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was the main tool to secure regulative legitimacy with the community and it specified what was expected from the community and what was included and not included in the contract from NAEAL's side. The community had, however, only limited means to hold NAEAL accountable to the MoU. NAEAL's actions towards pragmatic legitimacy pressures consisted of the provision of adult education and literacy services. In addition, the communities were expecting additional material and economic gains from their relationship with the NGO. These were partially covered with small contributions, but the flow of visitors that accompanied NAEAL's visits was also a source of potential future patronage.

The communities had prior experience with NGOs and knew what could be expected from them. This was the base for normative legitimacy and the engagement of the communities in the various new activities introduced to them. They assisted NAEAL in fulfilling the donor expectations in the hope of continued support. Normative as well as cultural-cognitive pressures for legitimacy were attended to by NAEAL's field staff, which knew how to build relationships with the communities and broker between them and the donor demands.

The emerging managerial strategies towards the communities were *brokerage, patronage, co-creation of responses to donor demands together with the communities, and empowering women*. Establishing relationships with the communities first through brokerage led to expectations of patronage from the communities. In return, they would engage in co-production of the various structures, practices, and artefacts that were needed for donors and their continued support for NAEAL and its efforts in the communities. Part of the donor ideals that were co-produced were the ideals of women's empowerment. Instead of considering the possible local practices that enhance women's role in society, the programmes tended to import Western concepts of women as caretakers or as neo-liberal champions and self-made businesswomen. In both cases, women became objects of surveillance and observation.

For NAEAL, the engagement with this individualistic donor agenda might cause mission drift if it starts to promote the ideals of everyone for themselves instead of communities' engagement in social transformation through awareness raising and conscientization on a collective basis.

8 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to increase understanding of Southern NGOs (SNGO) balancing between the organizational field of development cooperation and the local institutional context. The study centred on legitimation in a situation of several legitimacy audiences and their demands towards a Southern NGO. The contradictions these demands might have revealed and the organizational responses used to manage them were analysed. Using a case study of a Liberian NGO, the study found that the local NGO engaged in various managerial strategies to enhance its legitimacy at the intersection of these different contexts and with several legitimacy audiences.

This study offered new contributions in three main ways. First, it used concepts from organizational institutionalism, which is a relatively new approach to the study of development NGOs. Second, the study focused simultaneously on the multiple relationships of an SNGO instead of scrutinizing only its relationship with donors, or with a government or communities. Third, it offered a case from a post-conflict context in Liberia, which is a less studied context in NGO management research.

The data for this case study were gathered during three field trips to Liberia between 2012 and 2013 through organizational development interventions, interviews, participant observation, and document review.

In this chapter, I first reflect and combine the main findings for each research question. Second, I discuss the contributions the study makes to research on development management and organizational institutionalism, especially from the point of view of how this study might advance understanding of NGOs in development. Third, I explore the limitations of the study, and, finally, I suggest some ideas for further research.

8.1 Key findings of the study

The study explored two specific research questions: (1) What are the most important legitimacy audiences for an SNGO? (2) What kind of organizational responses does an SNGO use to manage legitimacy audiences' multiple legitimacy demands? I identified three main legitimacy audiences: the Ministry of Education, donors, and the local communities where NAEAL works. As a result of the analysis, I constructed five main managerial strategies that NAEAL used to manage the varying legitimacy demands of these legitimacy audiences. These were *Conforming to local NGOing; Influencing; Striving for independence;, Conforming to local cultural-cognitive expectations; and Co-creating responses to legitimacy audiences' own legitimacy pressures.* These key findings are summarized in Table 8 and elaborated below.

TABLE 8 Summary of key findings of the study

Research question	Key findings
1. What are the most important legitimacy audiences perceived by an SNGO?	Main legitimacy audiences - Ministry of Education - Donors - Communities
2. What kind of organizational responses does an SNGO use to manage legitimacy audiences' multiple legitimacy demands?	Main managerial strategies - Conforming to local NGOing - Influencing - Striving for independence - Conforming to local cultural-cognitive expectations - Co-creating responses to legitimacy audiences' own legitimacy pressures.

8.1.1 Legitimacy audiences

In this study, legitimacy audiences were defined as the stakeholders that are important in conferring legitimacy to an organization based on whether their expectations concerning the organization, its characteristics, and actions are met (Suchman 1995). As the identification of the legitimacy audiences is an empirical question, NAEAL staff took part in exploring the organization's most important relationships and concluded that the three main stakeholder groups were the Ministry of Education, donors, and communities. Based on this I concluded that these three would be the most important legitimacy audiences for the NGO.

The Ministry of Education represented the government and regulated the education sector, meaning it held a powerful position within the educational field, even though it lacked the resources to fully execute its role as the sector regulator, the implementer of policies, or service provider. The MoE also had invisible forms of power due to culturally accepted forms of behaviour that meant that the representatives of the administration were always treated with the utmost respect in encounters and given space to act as the leader of the sector.

To be able to operate in Liberia, an NGO needs to consider the government in power in the specific period of history. The extent of government control towards civil society has fluctuated during the different phases of Liberia's and NAEAL's history. In the 1970s and 1980s, government interference in civil society was notable. During the civil war, the Taylor government was also able to restrict the space of civil society. During the Johnson Sirleaf government, local civil society continued to receive support from the international donor community, although towards the end of the period the government wished to see this support redirected to the government itself.

NAEAL has opted not to resist the government in power but to collaborate with it in combating illiteracy in the country. It has even taken decisions requested by the government, as was the case when it expelled members that wished to implement Ethiopian-style literacy campaigns with socialist aspirations during the Doe government at the beginning of the 1980s.

In the Liberian context, being smart means not openly resisting powerholders but maintaining cordial relationships while at the same time using soft forms of advocacy to promote one's cause. This included nurturing contacts with the government. Especially ministers and other state officials that came from the ranks of NAEAL were useful contacts.

Adult literacy training as a technology suits various purposes. It could be used as a political tool for the liberation of the masses, as it was in Brazil in the 1960s and 1970s. However, in Liberia adult literacy has been mainly connected to economic and human growth, and NAEAL has taken the tone of each era into account in its work. The themes that NAEAL takes up in its literacy circles are not threatening to those in power. For example, during the Johnson Sirleaf government, the work embraced neo-liberal ideas of individual empowerment and economic gain instead of a stronger emphasis on social transformation, which was stated in the vision of the organization.

The donors were a major legitimacy audience because they controlled financial and other resources. Especially the regulations, professional norms, social understandings, and assumptions that were taken for granted that derived from the organizational field of development cooperation meant that NAEAL had to engage with numerous norms and practices to gain legitimacy among donors.

The donors were, however, a heterogeneous group among themselves, ranging from large multinational organizations including the World Bank and the various UN organizations to bi-lateral donors or international NGOs. Some local organizations, for example, the Sirleaf Market Women's Fund, also acted as donors because they had received funding from international donors and then contracted NAEAL to execute the activities. Some private funds were also directed to NAEAL through Equatorial Palm Oil, a private company. Some internal power struggles could be identified, for example, between UNESCO and USAID as they competed over the ideological leadership of the education sector.

Without consideration to the other actors, donors introduced various templates that derived from the field of development cooperation but that had been adapted by the donor in question. This meant that NAEAL was confronted with multiple requirements for project planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation as well as with various capacity-building events that introduced the latest fashions within the field as interpreted by the respective donor organization.

Communities provided legitimacy for NAEAL and other actors engaged in adult literacy, because they all needed the communities to take part in the various activities and to produce results that could then be reported upwards in the aid chain. Despite their importance, the communities themselves reverted to the local institution of patronage and preferred to position themselves more as clients in their relationship with NAEAL. Communities would use more invisible cultural-cognitive forms of power to engage with NAEAL, such as when they requested more visits and resources for their community.

Communities were a heterogeneous legitimacy audience. They did not form a unified group, nor did they have contact with each other. There were differences between communities as well as within them. Some communities would be very active in attracting outside assistance and others had a certain air of lethargy or trauma still hanging over them. Within the communities, various groups competed over the benefits that could be gained from the interventions. Various new donor-induced structures could provide some incentives that were sought after and caused jealousies within a community.

8.1.2 Main managerial strategies

I now present the five main managerial strategies that NAEAL used in its relations with its main legitimacy audiences, which I constructed by synthesizing the strategies identified vis-á-vis different audiences in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. They are *Conforming to local NGOing; Influencing; Striving for independence; Conforming to local cultural-cognitive expectations; and Co-creating responses to legitimacy audiences' own legitimacy pressures* (see Table 9 below).

TABLE 9 Main managerial strategies

Main managerial strategy	Ministry of Education	Donors	Communities
Conforming to local NGOing	Complying with laws and regulations Complementing the Ministry of Education in service production	Complying with donor contracts Conforming to donor efforts to make the organization look like a local NGO	Brokering between donors and communities

Influencing	Influencing the Ministry of Education representatives by involving them in the governance of the organization, inviting them to events and field trips, showing examples of new approaches	Influencing donors to be more sensitive to the local context by engaging them in activities, and discussions	
Striving for independence	Manipulating through influencing the context via advocacy, policymaking, and networking Buffering the organization from excessive government influence via gaining legitimacy among other audiences and receiving funding from various sources	Portraying compliance and responsiveness to donor initiatives Buffering the organizations through looking for funding from various donors	
Conforming to local cultural-cognitive expectations	Conforming to common ideals and cultural-cognitive expectations (respectful relations)	Taking care of the NAEAL family by hunting for projects and distributing benefits	Entering a patronage relationship with the communities
Co-creating responses to legitimacy audiences' own legitimacy pressures	Service provision and learning results in adult literacy Attempts to gather information on service provision in adult literacy Advocacy for adult literacy and adult education (including media attention) Participation in drafting policies Empowering women	Implementation of projects and delivery of results Producing monitoring and evaluation information for back donor needs Empowering women	Organization of literacy circles that provide improved literacy and life skills (service delivery) Some forms of economic benefits and possibilities for side-tracking Contacts to attract new patrons Empowering women

The first of the main managerial strategies is *conforming to local NGOing*. All three legitimacy audiences had their own understanding and expectations on what a proper local NGO looks like and how it acts, ranging from government regulations and laws to donor fads, and to the ways the communities recognized NAEAL as a local NGO. In conclusion, there are clear scripts on what a local NGO should look like and what its role is within the organizational field of development cooperation and within the local context.

The local authorities expected that an NGO complies with the laws and regulations of the country. In Liberia, there are specific requirements concerning the registration and characteristics of local NGOs and duties, especially concerning the reporting of activities in the Law on Associations. For the Ministry of Education, NAEAL is one of the providers of adult education and literacy in the country. Due to scarce resources, the MoE welcomes other actors to take part in the common goal of eradicating illiteracy from the country, and complementing the MoE's efforts is considered a local NGO's task. Due to the extended common history, the MoE representatives were familiar with NAEAL and could see it as one of the local NGOs dedicated to adult literacy.

Donors contracted project implementation to local NGOs and followed up on their performance. In addition to selecting the local NGOs based on donor-specific criteria, most of the donors also provided capacity building that carried the expectations of donors on the characteristics of a proper local NGO. NAEAL and other local NGOs participated in a myriad of workshops and events that transmitted the ideologies, practices, and lexicons of development cooperation to the local actors. Embracing these opportunities and showing willingness to learn the tricks of the trade enhanced NAEAL's image as a worthy local NGO.

For both donors and local communities, it was important that NAEAL acted as a broker between them, because of the geographical and cultural distance between the two. This included mobilizing communities to take part in donor-financed projects and fulfilling the requirements for participation in the various activities. As the communities had been in contact with development cooperation projects and local NGOs before, they could recognize NAEAL as one of these intermediary organizations that could help them to tap donor resources for their own community.

The second main managerial strategy is *influencing*. This strategy can be found both in NAEAL's relationship with the Ministry of Education and the donors. In both cases, influencing broadened the legitimacy audience's understanding of the local realities and the ways of working effectively, which then helped the collaboration in the long run.

NAEAL involved the MoE representatives very concretely in its work through the Board membership, which enabled an exchange of information. By extending invitations to workshops and during field trips, NAEAL was able to display its work and new approaches to adult education. For example, the findings on learning results presented during an evaluation dissemination workshop convinced the MoE representatives of the efficacy of NAEAL's participatory approach to adult literacy.

NAEAL was able to influence the donors by visiting the projects together with donor representatives and showing the work on the ground. With longer-term engagement, it was also possible to revise teaching materials and curricula to better suit local conditions. Perhaps the most effective way to change donor perspectives was the executive director's engagement with them, as donors appreciated his knowledge of the local political context.

The third main managerial strategy is *striving for independence.* For the longer-term survival of the organization, it was important to create more space for the organization's own actions. One way to do this was to manipulate the political context where adult literacy was exercised. Although NAEAL used non-confrontational forms of advocacy in its dealings with the Ministry of Education, it participated in various networks and fora for policymaking and advocacy for adult literacy. These activities broadened the space for NGOs and other actors to engage in drafting policies and, at the same time, eased the power relationship with the MoE.

Another strategy that was used to buffer the excessive power of the Ministry of Education was broadening the financial base of the organization and gaining legitimacy among various other stakeholders. Participation in civil society networks enhanced NAEAL's status as one of the important local actors, and contacts within the donor community and a multitude of local communities broadened NAEAL's legitimacy basis and gave it leverage towards the MoE.

In relation to donors, NAEAL looked for funding from various sources as contracts were usually short term and there was a need to constantly hunt for new projects. Working with multiple projects and donors helped in avoiding dependence on any single donor. NAEAL made a conscious effort to save some of the overheads for other uses, such as constructing their own centre that would then exempt them from paying rent or potentially losing the office space.

Another way to strive for independence from donors was by portraying compliance and responsiveness to donor initiatives. With several donors that had different policies and practices, it was not possible to follow all the suggestions to the letter, but as the donors did not follow up on each other's activities, they were unaware of the multiple claims on NAEAL.

The fourth main managerial strategy was *conforming to local cultural-cognitive expectations*, which was important within the local context. NAEAL had to consider the prevailing value systems and culturally accepted forms of behaviour to work efficiently within the local context. These expectations derived from the Ministry of Education, the staff, and the communities.

Throughout the history of the organization, there had been the necessity to consider the government in power. This was reflected in the justifications given to the promotion of literacy ranging from human development to promotion of reading in local languages to gender equality, depending on the orientation of the respective government. Respectful relationships with the staff of the Ministry of Education were nurtured through personal interaction and by giving space to MoE representatives in various formal spaces such as the board and seminars.

The relationship with the staff was characterized by considering the people that worked or had worked but were out of employment, and their family members, as the NAEAL family. The management was considered to have a responsibility to look for new opportunities to employ people or at least to provide possibilities for volunteering or other benefits.

The communities' expectations revolved around different kinds of material and non-material benefits that could be derived from the engagement with NAEAL. These expectations were formulated in the spirit of patronage and the expectation was that the relationship would be for a longer-term than what the donor projects usually lasted. Patronage is a morally accepted, appropriate way to organize relationships in Liberia, although Western donor representatives might frown upon it.

The most important finding of this study is the fifth strategy of *co-creating responses to legitimacy audiences' own legitimacy pressures.* This refers to the efforts that NAEAL took to help each of its legitimacy audiences fulfil their legitimacy needs for their own legitimacy audiences, such as the back donors, the government, the general public or different groups within the communities.

The provision of services within adult literacy could be aligned with government goals and with donor goals. All of the main legitimacy audiences, that is the Ministry of Education, the donors, and the communities, benefited from the services provision and learning results delivered by NAEAL in adult literacy. The MoE could use these results to show that it was fulfilling its role within the sector and contributing to the solving of the persistent problem of adult illiteracy in the country. The mapping of the literacy circles showed the coverage of services in different counties and the numbers of participants could be used to display the extent of these services. The Alternative Basic Education division could use this information within the Ministry of Education and the government in general as well as towards the donor community and the public as part of the overall efforts that were being taken to advance adult literacy. In addition to the concrete results and numbers, the work that NAEAL did in promoting the importance of literacy both through events and media contacts and by engaging in policy work promoted the issue and strengthened the position of the Alternative Basic Education division. Therefore, NAEAL's provision of services, its advocacy work, and engagement in drafting policies improved the Ministry of Education's own legitimacy within the sector.

Donors needed local implementers for the projects, meaning the efficient delivery of the activities was key to them. Donors needed to justify their work towards their own back donors, be they institutional donors or private persons in the global North. This means that donors required large amounts of monitoring and evaluation information to show that the investments had produced measurable results on the ground. Donors provided extensive training and capacity building to NAEAL so that it could produce the needed information in the required formats.

NAEAL needed the collaboration of the communities for the implementation of the projects. In addition to the learning results from the literacy circles, other outputs were also expected from the projects. These included the establishment of new structures, such as literacy management committees and other groups within the communities, new practices, such as the construction and use of eco-pit latrines, and the artefacts as in workbooks filled with completed exercises, photos, and human-interest stories for marketing purposes and, in some projects, new products for the local markets.

The different groups within the communities had their own stakes in the play and their own legitimacy audiences that expected to gain from the projects. In addition to the services provided for the communities, especially the material and economic gains that might be accrued from the projects incentivized the community leadership to take part in the projects. In addition to the patronage relationship they formed with NAEAL, they were also expecting to form contacts with donors and other outsiders to establish new patronage relationships. With all this in mind, the communities collaborated and participated in the co-creation of the different responses needed for legitimacy requirements from donors, and the Ministry of Education, for that matter.

A special case of co-creation of legitimacy responses was related to the empowerment of women, which was a central donor fad at the beginning of the 2010s in Liberia. The most vocal donors engaged in programmes that pushed especially for women's economic empowerment. This coincided with the presidency of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia, which meant that women's empowerment was a goal for the government as well. NAEAL leadership, as well as the community leaders, understood that engaging at least rhetorically with the discourse on women's empowerment would be beneficial for the attainment of projects and other benefits.

Certainly, the women benefited from their new literacy skills and gained some control over their lives as they became more confident with accessing health services, or following up their children's schoolwork, and doing business on the local market. However, as the beginning of the 2010s coincided with the heavy push for results-based management with a considerable amount of monitoring requirements, women in the projects became objects of observation and surveillance. In addition to this, the development language of the time reduced women to small businesswomen, mothers, and caretakers within their communities, which diluted the idea of women's empowerment as a structural change in power relations and in fulfilling women's strategic interests.

8.1.3 Reflections on change in organizational attributes

As organizational institutionalism sees the search for legitimacy as a major source of organizational change (Greenwood & Hinings 1996), it becomes important to reflect on how the pressures from the identified legitimacy audiences potentially influenced change in NAEAL. What follows are reflections on the potential implications of the main managerial strategies as well as those of the contextual factors for NAEAL's organizational change. To do so, I concentrate on four organizational attributes, namely field position, structure, governance, and identity, that filter the pressures from an organizational field or the local context and condition the ways an organization is apt to respond to these pressures (Greenwood et al. 2011).

The major influencers turned out to be the civil wars that wiped out the chapters and almost the entire organization, and the pressures from the field of development cooperation that affected the structure and identity of NAEAL.

NAEAL has maintained its field position as a local literacy organization in Liberia. During the 1970s and 1980s, NAEAL was also well connected with the African Association of Literacy and Adult Education (African Women and Peace Support Group 2004, 72–73) and had some regional standing as well. During its history, NAEAL has nurtured its contacts with different ministries. In the beginning, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and Ministry of Rural Development were institutional members of the organization together with the University of Liberia. (NAEAL 1989.) In the 2010s, collaboration existed mainly with the Ministry of Education and through projects with the Ministry of Gender and Development. As NAEAL was a member of the major networks and initiatives within the adult education sector, such as the Forum of Alternative Basic Education, and it had a profile of a good service provider, the organization was considered as an important actor within the sub-sector of alternative basic education.

Although internationally NAEAL might have been a peripheral organization, NAEAL's position between the local context and the institutional field of development cooperation meant that it became an important broker between these two spheres. It transmitted ideas on how to engage in alternative basic education for illiterate adults, and especially how to conduct adult literacy programmes, from the field to the local context and sensitized donors on local conditions that needed to be taken into consideration to secure results.

As referred to above, changes in the structure of the organization occurred. Here, the term *structure* refers to the division of labour within an organization and to the different internal groups and their ability to influence the organization. The ability to influence is conditioned especially by the amount of exposure and the thickness of the ties of a specific group outside the organization, and the relative power that a group has within the organization. (Greenwood et al. 2011, 342–344.)

Staff profiles had been influenced by the Ministry of Education already in the 1980s when some staff members had to leave the organization as the government disapproved of any socialist orientations. More recently, the interaction with the field of development cooperation was changing the dynamics among the internal groups within NAEAL.

Due to the pressures from the donors, people that knew how to speak the donor language, write English, and interact with donors were becoming more important. The possibilities to interact with the donor community varied according to the position in the organization and, for example, the number of capacity-building opportunities offered by different donor projects. The executive directors were in the best position to establish relationships with donors as they had regular meetings with donor representatives. The increasing donor requirements on financial and project administration meant that the financial administrator and the different project coordinators also assisted training and delivered the different kinds of reports needed by the donors. Because of the importance of financial and other resources coming from the donor community, these staff members were becoming more powerful in comparison to the staff that catered for the other legitimacy audiences' needs.

A special feature of the donor pressure was the demand for professionalization. Some donors started to require university degrees for entry-level project staff. This was then combined with intensive training on donor-specific tools and fashions. In fact, as Kontinen (2018) notes, professionalization is less about learning but more about adapting to the ways of the field of international development cooperation. Simultaneously, local development elite was starting to emerge from the Liberians that interacted with the donor community and among their peers in the various capacity-building events. This was a new phenomenon. Such an elite had not existed before the influx of donors into Liberia in the aftermath of the civil wars for the reconstruction of the country.

Field-level staff that interacted with the communities in local languages and knew how to mobilize and engage with community people were shifting further away from the core of the organization. The same happened with the staff that maintained the relationships with the Ministry of Education.

NAEAL's governance changed from a member-led organization to a one led by a board of directors over the years of civil wars. Originally, NAEAL was a membership-based organization with chapters in the various counties of the country and it provided services for its members. The chapters formed the National Congress, which was the highest decision-making body. During the wars, these structures disappeared, and the board, as stipulated in the Law of Associations, led the organization. The legal requirements were important both for the government authorities, but also for donors that needed formally recognized local NGOs as brokers for their interventions. Internally, though, the board had challenges to follow up the organization's work due to the different donor-specific requirements on financial and narrative reporting. Respectively, the executive directors' position grew in importance as they channelled the donor requirements to the organization and liaised with them.

NAEAL's identity on the institutional level is attached to it being a local non-governmental organization among other local NGOs. Being a local NGO means fulfilling the legal requirements for that status, as well as the behaviours expected from a local NGO by the donor agencies and the local stakeholders. This ranges from service delivery to various forms of advocacy work. On the organizational level, there is a need to be distinct from other organizations within the same category. NAEAL has been rather successful in this with its focus on being an organization that provides adult literacy services and stresses the importance of adult literacy for the nation's development. One form to distinguish an organization from others is choosing a name that both conforms to prevalent practices but also distinguishes it from others. Being the National Adult Education Association of Liberia paints a picture of a nationwide organization working throughout the entire country with a focus on adult education while the word *association* refers to the non-governmental nature of the organization. Among the adult literacy service providers, NAEAL distinguished itself through the participatory approach of working with the communities that draws inspiration from the REFLECT methodology, which combines participatory rural appraisal techniques with adult literacy pedagogy of Paolo Freire. This combination delivered results in both literacy and community participation.

NAEAL's history shows that organizational identity requires conscious management. With the influx of various kinds of donor projects during the reconstruction phase, NAEAL was engaged in projects ranging from agriculture to water and sanitation, to peace and reconciliation. This posed a threat to the organization's identity as an adult education specialist. Later on, donor agendas that emphasize market-based solutions and individual success stories have threatened NAEAL's mission on social transformation through community engagement.

In summary, NAEAL has changed as an organization due to pressures from the organizational field of development cooperation and due to historic changes in the local context. However, the organization has been able to maintain its field position as an important local adult literacy provider. Structurally, NAEAL has been drawn closer to the field of development cooperation and the importance of professionalization and the qualifications needed for interaction with the donors have grown in importance. This is also affecting the governance of NAEAL, as donor requirements sideline the board's capacity to govern the organization. NAEAL has done conscious work to maintain its identity as a national adult education specialist. However, mission drift from community engagement with national development towards individual liberalism was taking place at the beginning of the 2010s.

8.1.4 Main arguments of the study

Based on the findings and the above synthetizing reflections, I raise four arguments concerning the legitimacy of SNGOs.

First, both the field of development and the local context count as the SNGO needs to survive within both of these spheres and it needs the legitimacy and resources that derive from both of them. However, an SNGO will only continue to exist in the local context, and therefore, maintaining its legitimacy with the local legitimacy audiences is more important in the long run.

Second, the SNGO can exploit the legitimacy it derives from the multiple audiences as leverage with the other audiences. In reference to the first argument, the SNGO can use this aspect of legitimacy in its dealings with the local constituents, for example, the local ministry, to curb its power in relation to the organization.

Third, I propose a managerial strategy of co-creation of responses to legitimacy audiences' own legitimacy pressures. The SNGO in this study contributed to meeting its legitimacy audiences' needs to secure their own legitimacy in relation to their own legitimacy audiences. This occurred, for example, in producing monitoring data for back donor needs, in securing results on adult literacy for the Ministry of Education, and in catering for the needs of powerful groups within the communities that were tied up in their own patrimonial ties.

Finally, the study highlights the growing influence of the field of development cooperation as it changes not only the local NGOs but the entire context, by creating a new local elite of local development professionals. This did not exist before the entry of the international development actors, but it will have an unprecedented impact as can be seen from other countries that have been in contact with the field of development cooperation for an extended period of time.

8.2 Contribution to research

The findings of this study provide insights into both studies on development NGOs and their management and organizational institutionalism and the interplay between these two fields of study.

NGO management studies have been accused of being normative and merely producing manuals for practitioners and not engaging with theory. Many concepts that are used in the development practice are used within development studies and NGO management studies as well without profoundly considering the normative nature of many of these concepts. In this study, the engagement with organizational institutionalism has been an attempt to provide theoretical concepts for NGO management research as well. The key concept in this study was legitimacy. It was defined as the assessment and valuation of an organization's stakeholders on the acceptability of an organization within its particular institutional context. Within organizational institutionalism, the notion of legitimacy carries with it ideas of norms, values, and beliefs that are socially constructed, and therefore vary from place to place.

This study adds to the new and emerging field of applications on organizational institutionalism on development cooperation (see Claeyé & Jackson 2012; Kontinen 2018; Fejerskov 2018; Brinkerhoff 2005; Elbers & Arts 2011; Brown & Jagadananda 2007; Burchardt 2013; Watkins et al. 2012.). To date, organizational institutionalism has been a Western line of research, but it resonates with African contexts as well. Globalization of practices and cultures is taking place globally, which creates an interplay of the local context and the global institutional pressures (Pache & Santos 2010, 471). The field of development cooperation is an even more special case because it projects institutional logics internationally and interferes directly with the local with an intention to change it.

This means that contextualization becomes important. In this study, a new country context, Liberia, was introduced and it showed the importance that the local context and historical changes have for organizational responses to field-level pressures. The fact that Liberia was also a post-conflict country added to the dynamics that took place between the local and the international and, I would claim, added to the influence of the field level pressures in a situation where the national government was weak. This allowed the field of development cooperation to expand its effects and shrink the space of the local organizations. This was done by influencing the local civil society, supporting it while also depoliticizing it by making it an implementer of donor projects, and by engaging with the government and occasionally bypassing it.

By considering the interplay of the local and the international, this study contributes to the understanding of complexity within organizational fields. As Pache and Santos (2010) explain, organizations that operate across various institutional fields encounter multiple and conflicting institutional demands and may be confronted with regulations, norms, and cultural logics that contradict each other. Here I have considered various legitimacy audiences at the same time and found that the Ministry of Education as the sector regulator, donors, and the communities all had differing legitimacy demands and expectations for the local NGO.

However, although the NGO faced multiple legitimacy pressures, there was no immediate conflict between these pressures because all actors cooperated to enhance their own legitimacy within the field of development cooperation and the local context. The local NGO managed this situation by engaging in the co-creation of responses to legitimacy audiences' own legitimacy pressures. The study, therefore, confirms Burchardt's (2013) finding that different forms of legitimacy and legitimacy derived from different audiences are co-dependent. In development management studies, this has been described as interdependency between the different actors (Ebrahim 2003) as donors, for example, need reports in return for their finances. According to my understanding, managing the multiple legitimacy pressures becomes possible because the field of development cooperation is fragmented when it enters the local context. Each donor agency presents its own translation of the field-level ideas, which dilutes the effect of the scripts and templates of the field.

Conforming to local cultural-cognitive expectations is a managerial strategy that is needed for survival within the local context. For example, in the local context patronage is expected from actors that are in positions of power and that control resources. This also entails loyalty towards staff members beyond the normal labour codes and maintaining respectful relationships with powerful entities. The resources that are derived from the field of development cooperation are used to reinforce the patrimonial ties, but also to buffer the organization against excessive influence of the government.

Although the responses to legitimacy pressures are called managerial strategies in this study, I do not consider them as conscious choices. The concept of strategy in management studies, and even in organizational institutionalism, is laden with a presumption that organizations make conscious decisions on how they will respond to legitimacy pressures. I would claim that many decisions are path dependent in the sense that things are done as they have always been done, or they are unconscious or muddling-through types of actions. This is especially so because many of the legitimacy demands derive from cultural and cognitive norms that are not revealed and reflected upon regularly.

Development studies take power seriously (Gaventa 2021; McGee & Pettit 2020) while organizational institutionalism has been criticized for not engaging sufficiently with power. Although not much has been written explicitly about power by organizational institutionalists, it does not mean that it fails to engage with the topic. One of the most important contributions is by Lawrence (2008), who distinguished between systemic and episodic modes of power. Systemic power is embedded in institutions. Especially the taken-for-granted understandings and myths that carry invisible forms of power are difficult for outsiders to observe. For example, in the case of Liberia, the big men networks and the institution of patrimonialism are effective and powerful and filled with hidden and invisible forms of power that are not recognizable to outsiders such as donor representatives.

For Lawrence (2008) resistance and agency are events that entail episodic forms of power within an organizational field. Although an organization depends on its legitimacy audiences for legitimacy and resources (DiMaggio & Powell 1983; Oliver 1991; Pfeffer & Salancik 1978), when it comes to intraorganizational relations within an organizational field, the different managerial strategies an organization uses in its relations with various legitimacy audiences are forms of agency. A local NGO brokers between donors and communities, influences its legitimacy audiences with diverse actions, and uses the legitimacy gained from one audience as leverage with another and strives for independence from donors as well as from national actors, such as the Ministry of Education in the case of NAEAL.

Many of the organizational models of NGOs provided for development practitioners revolve around being, doing, and relating (see e.g. James & Wrigley 2007). The donor capacity-building interventions seemed to follow this pattern as well, and they mainly provided inputs for the being and doing part, with their emphasis on tools that were to enhance technical capacities in finances, data collection for monitoring, and skills in delivering messages to communities and project participants. However, from an institutionalist perspective on organizations and based on the observations in this study, relating should be considered the most important capacity, as an SNGO exists because of legitimacy gained from outside of the organization. It could be said that an SNGO is constructed as an organization through these legitimacy relationships.

Within the field of development cooperation, there are different roles for different organizations, and one of these roles is being a local NGO. My findings showed that the different legitimacy audiences had specific expectations for a local NGO and that there were scripts and templates on how a good local NGO should behave. The case study NGO responded to these expectations through the managerial strategy of conforming to local NGOing, which included complying with laws, regulations, and contracts, providing services, and brokering between donors and communities, but also going along with the various donor efforts to transform the organization into the donor ideal of a local

NGO. The donor efforts contribute isomorphism among development NGOs as they mould the NGOs into a particular image and role within the organizational field of development cooperation.

The adoption of donor-prescribed Northern models by development actors, including Northern and Southern NGOs, has been criticized (see e.g. Dar & Cooke 2008; Gulrajani 2011; Eyben et al. 2015; Banks et al. 2015). The field of development cooperation and its organizational models and scripts do indeed mould the minds of people and the functioning of their organizations. However, the adoption of circulating models and scripts is not unique to development cooperation. According to organizational institutionalism, the same happens in various organizational fields, because that is the very dynamics of an organizational field. To be considered a legitimate actor, and to survive within a particular organizational field, an organization has to, at least to some degree, take on the scripts of the field. Development cooperation can thus be viewed an organizational field just as any other organizational field is.

8.3 Limitations of the study

This study focused on an SNGO's position between the international field of development cooperation and the local context, which in this case was Liberia. The aim was to understand the different legitimacy demands that arise from these different environments and how the NGO manages them.

Concentration on only one NGO was deemed sufficient because the multiple relationships provided extensive material for analysis and helped in deepening the understanding of the issue at hand. Only a few researchers (mainly Ebrahim 2003) have tried to grasp multiple relationships at the same time.

As the main interest was on the relationships of the organization with its main legitimacy audiences, namely the Ministry of Education, donors and communities, the internal dynamics of the organization itself or, for example, of the communities, were left outside the scope of this study. Some observations on the internal power relations were, however, made in interactions, meetings, workshops, and conveyed through interviews and informal communication.

In Chapter 3, which deals with the methodology of this study, I have already reflected on some of the issues that might have a bearing on the quality of my data and that might have an effect on my results. These included the way I obtained access to the organization and to my informants, aspects of data collection and analysis, and my positionality as a practitioner and researcher.

If I were to start over, I would pay more attention to power relationships and questions of research ethics in general. The Finnish Refugee Council (FRC), one of NAEAL's donors, facilitated my access to NAEAL. My first contacts with my informants were established by powerful gatekeepers such as the executive director of NAEAL or the FRC resident representative. A power imbalance could be identified especially in the case of NAEAL staff members. However, as I visited the organization three times within a two-year period, the interaction became more balanced. Rapport improved with multiple visits and with my immersion in daily activities during the visits.

This does not mean that my data were not influenced by social desirability bias, as the informants might have opted to disclose information in a form they thought would be expected from them. Especially leaders in the communities I visited used the opportunity to explain the financial needs in their community as if they would be approaching a donor representative. My extended experience as a development practitioner, I would like to believe, helped me in filtering and understanding these kinds of biases. They do, however, tell something about the need to establish relationships with prospective patrons, which is a rational thing to do in those circumstances. As I was aware of this, I used multiple data collection methods in order to secure the triangulation of data.

Other limitations with data collection were caused by my lack of fluency in Liberian English and time limitations. Especially in the beginning, I had to rely on translation, which of course affects the ease of communication with people. Time was a scarce resource. Due to my family situation at the time, I could not extend my stay in Liberia for more than five to six weeks per visit. This affected my choice of data collection methods. Although an ethnographic study would have required an extended stay in Liberia, I was able to immerse myself the realities of NAEAL during the three field trips and use methods inspired by ethnography, such as participant observation and taking part in everyday activities and doing field notes and reflection, during my fieldwork.

In retrospect, I think that conducting three distinct visits instead of one extended stay helped me in refocusing my research questions and the respective data collection. Before starting my main fieldwork, my interests revolved around finding out the NGO's conceptualizations and practices on monitoring and evaluation, especially from accountability and learning perspectives. My informants kept repeating the importance of monitoring and evaluation, but the data I collected showed that evaluation was not about learning, nor about downward accountability, but it was certainly very important for the donors.

Fortunately, I included questions related to the relationships that the respondents and their organization had with NAEAL. These questions provided open-ended material that started to indicate that the relationships included shared goals, trust, reciprocity, and collaboration.

These observations made me refocus my research questions coupled with the understanding that I had started to accumulate on organizational institutionalism. As there seemed to be a divide between ideals and actual practices, the research questions were re-formulated to address legitimacy concerns and the data started to make more sense.

As I noted in Chapter 3, working on this dissertation has been a learning process for me. My research questions changed and my interest shifted as my thinking developed. I would like to see this evolution as something typical of qualitative research, where the research problems of the study can be modified as the research progresses and understanding of the phenomenon in question deepens.

I opted for two research questions addressing the NGO's main legitimacy audiences and the managerial strategies it used to manage the multiple legitimacy demands from these audiences. A more focused, or limited, scope might have produced deeper insights, but the holistic approach enabled me to uncover the different aspects of cooperation that emerged in the interaction over time. Furthermore, such an approach also enabled me to note some tendencies within the organization that reveal the influence of especially the field of development cooperation and its scripts on an SNGO.

8.4 Recommendations for further research

Three aspects from this study could be considered for further research. Firstly, what to study, secondly, how to study and thirdly, how to increase the societal impact of development studies around the questions raised in this study.

The themes for further research include an institutional analysis of local dynamics, examination of other triple nexus contexts and probing of the more resent development fads and their influence within the field of development cooperation.

A greater focus on local dynamics through institutional lenses could produce interesting findings and add to the understanding of how development interventions are captured by the local institutions. Local institutions and logics as well as power relations may not be visible to the Western eye, but they have a bearing on how development interventions are localized and adapted to different contexts and interests.

In order to understand what happens within the triple nexus of humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peacebuilding, there is plenty of room for further research on the effects of different types of interventions. Although policy work has advanced around the triple nexus thinking, the practice continues to lag behind. Fragility is an especially complex situation and intensive donor involvement may cause harm and unintended consequences, especially when there are multiple logics at play even within the international actors that engage in a triple nexus situation.

More broadly, research is needed to explore the new fashions entering the field of development cooperation after new public management caused the obsessive measurement disorder. These new fashions, which include ideas of systemic change and are more sensitive towards complexity, are being introduced under the names of "adaptive management" (Laws & Valters 2021) and even "trust-based management" (Alexius & Vähämäki 2020). It will be interesting to see how these different approaches compete within the field and how they will be translated as they are adopted by different organizations.

In the future, more collaborative approaches to research should be pursued, as being part of a process is a good way to learn. The possibility to explore together with practitioners, development administrators and policymakers would benefit both research and practice. Practical hindrances, ranging from time to money, exist and therefore the commitment of all stakeholders would need to be ensured, starting with the planning phases of research projects. Southern researchers' input would be needed to enhance local capacities and to help the knowledge stay in-country and available for local policy processes. This would enrich development research with new ideas and understandings and break down its existing neo-colonial features.

These are not new ideas. They have been tried, but they should be further pursued. Collaboration with participants, researchers and institutions from the Global South and North are additional ways to enhance the societal impact of development research.

The impact of development interventions as well as of research is an unpredictable process and difficult to verify. However, development research can offer insights into the varied impacts that development interventions might cause. The problem is that these insights rarely find their way into practice. Therefore, research results need to be communicated in ways that are digestible for development practitioners and policymakers. These should differ in form depending on the respective audience.

Nowadays, networking, advocating and social media presence are expected from researchers as part of demonstrating societal impact. Within development these approaches make good sense as most development researchers are probably also dedicated to the betterment of the conditions of the world's underprivileged. However, the insistence of providing advice and recommendations on specific cases or interventions makes a researcher uneasy because research projects are usually not designed for such a purpose. With data and increased understanding, stakeholders can make their own decisions, especially as those include negotiation and possible power struggles.

My hope is that this study helps development practitioners in the Global North and South to reflect on their role within the field of development cooperation and provides tools to seize their agency within it.

YHTEENVETO (SUMMARY IN FINNISH)

Tämä tutkimus edistää ymmärrystä etelän kansalaisjärjestöjen roolista ja suhteista kansainvälisen kehitysyhteistyön kentän ja paikallisen kontekstin välissä, erityisesti konfliktin jälkeisessä tilanteessa.

Tutkimus rikastaa kehitysyhteistyötä tekeviä kansalaisjärjestöjä koskevaa tutkimusta kolmella tapaa. Ensinnäkin järjestöt nähdään osana kehitysyhteistyön kenttää, jota pyritään ymmärtämään organisationaalisen institutionalismin tarjoamin käsittein. Toiseksi tarkastelu tapahtuu globaalissa etelässä toimivan järjestön näkökulmasta siten, että huomioon otetaan samanaikaisesti sen suhteet useisiin eri sidosryhmiin. Kolmanneksi mukaan tuodaan vähemmän tutkittu maakonteksti, Liberia, ja historiallinen tilanne, jossa konfliktin jälkeisen jälleenrakennusvaiheen jälkeen ollaan siirtymässä pitkäjänteisempään kehitysyhteistyöhön.

Tutkimuksessa kehitysyhteistyö käsitetään organisationaalisena kenttänä, jolle on ominaista tietyt ideat, normit ja symboliset elementit, sekä sosiaaliset mekanismit, jotka muovaavat organisaatioita. Sosiaalisella ja historiallisella kontekstilla on tässä suuri merkitys, sillä normit, ideat ja symboliset elementit ovat erilaisia eri ympäristöissä ja eri aikakausina. Organisaation mahdollisuudet päästä mukaan kentälle ja toimia siellä ovat riippuvaisia muiden kentän toimijoiden käsityksistä sen sopivuudesta kyseiselle kentälle. Tätä olemassaolon oikeutusta kutsutaan legitimiteetiksi ja toimijoita, jotka arvioivat organisaatiota legitimiteettiyleisöiksi.

Kehitysyhteistyön kentällä toimijoilla monia rooleja ja ne ovat mukana monimutkaisissa suhdeverkostoissa. Tästä on seurauksena institutionaalisesti kompleksinen tilanne, jossa organisaatioon kohdistuu monenlaisia odotuksia ja vaatimuksia eri sidosryhmien taholta.

Tutkimus kysyy, mitkä ovat etelän kansalaisjärjestön käsityksen mukaan sen tärkeimmät legitimiteettiyleisöt ja millaisia organisationaalisia keinoja se käyttää selvitäkseen niiden moninaisista legitimiteettiä koskevista odotuksista ja vaatimuksista.

Tutkimuskysymyksiin etsittiin vastauksia laadullisen tapaustutkimuksen avulla. Aineisto kerättiin liberialaisen kansalaisjärjestön työstä organisaation kehittämisinterventioiden, haastattelujen, osallistuvan havainnoinnin ja dokumenttien avulla. Kyseessä oleva kansalaisjärjestö National Adult Education Association of Liberia, NAEAL, on perustettu jo vuonna 1977 edistämään aikuislukutaitoa Liberiassa. NAEAL järjestää lukupiirejä, joissa harjoitellaan perusluku- ja kirjoitustaitoa käyttämällä menetelmää, joka pohjautuu Paolo Freiren pedagogiseen ajatteluun ja osallistaviin harjoituksiin. Järjestö on muuttunut pitkän historiansa aikana. Tähän ovat vaikuttaneet erityisesti sisällissotien aika, joka uhkasi järjestön olemassaoloa, sekä avunantajien käytännöt, jotka ovat muokanneet järjestön rakennetta ja identiteettiä.

Tutkimuksessa identifioitiin kolme merkittävintä legitimiteettiyleisöä, jotka olivat opetusministeriö, avunantajat ja paikalliset yhteisöt. Opetusministeriö edusti valtiota ja valvoi opetussektoria ja sen toimijoita. Avunantajat olivat tärkeitä, sillä ne toivat taloudellisia ja muita resursseja paikallisen järjestön käyttöön.

Vastineeksi ne odottivat, että paikalliset järjestöt omaksuivat kehitysyhteistyön kentän normit ja tavat tehdä kehitysyhteistyötä. Nämä normit, ideat ja tavat muuntuivat paikallisessa kontekstissa, sillä avunantajat välittivät niistä omat käsityksenä, joita paikalliset organisaatiot muokkasivat edelleen itselleen sopiviksi ja ymmärrettäviksi. Vaikka muut toimijat olivat periaatteessa riippuvaisia yhteisöissä tapahtuvasta työstä ja sen tuomista tuloksista, yhteisöt eivät käyttäneet valta-asemaansa vaan antautuivat mieluiten patrimoniaaliseen suhteeseen järjestön ja muiden toimijoiden kanssa.

Tutkimuksessa identifioitiin viisi strategiaa, joita etelän kansalaisjärjestö käytti suhteessa legitimiteettiyleisöihin ja niiden vaatimuksiin.

Ensinnäkin se mukautui paikallisen kansalaisjärjestön rooliin. Opetusministeriön, avunantajien ja yhteisöjen edustajilla oli erilaisia käsityksiä ja odotuksia siitä, millainen paikallisen kansalaisjärjestön tulisi olla. Nämä vaihtelivat erilaisista laeista ja viranomaismääräyksistä tehokkaaseen hanketoteutukseen ja avunantajien ja yhteisöjen välittäjänä toimimiseen.

Toiseksi järjestö vaikutti sekä avunantajien että viranomaisten käsityksiin perehdyttämällä näitä paikallisiin olosuhteisiin ja työskentelytapoihin.

Kolmanneksi järjestö pyrki säilyttämään itsenäisyytensä ja toimintatilansa. Erilaisten verkostojen jäsenyys ja politiikkaprosesseihin osallistuminen edisti järjestön mahdollisuuksia toimia suhteessa viranomaisiin ja taloudellisen pohjan laajentaminen toi itsenäisyyttä myös suhteessa avunantajiin.

Neljäs strategia oli paikallisiin kulttuuris-kognitiivisiin odotuksiin mukautuminen. Paikallisten arvojen ja kulttuurisesti hyväksyttyjen toimintatapojen mukaan toimiminen oli elinehto suhteessa hallintoon, henkilöstöön ja paikallisiin yhteisöihin. Esimerkiksi suhde henkilöstöön muistutti perheen tapaa pitää huolta jäsenistään, eli se meni pitemmälle kuin pelkkä työnantajasuhde. Yhteisöt taas toivoivat pitkäaikaista sitoutumista ja huolenpitoa järjestöltä, mutta se oli riippuvainen hankkeiden aikatauluista ja sisällöistä eikä voinut sitoutua ”hyväksi isännäksi”.

Viidenneksi järjestö pyrki huolehtimaan siitä, että eri toimijat pystyivät täyttämään omaan legitimiteettiinsä kohdistuvia vaateita. Tutkimuksessa yhteiskehittelyksi nimetty strategia kuvastaa toimijoiden keskinäistä riippuvuutta – ne joutuvat tekemään yhteistyötä, jotta kukin säilyttää legitimiteettinsä suhteessa omiin sidosryhmiinsä. Esimerkiksi avunantajat tarvitsevat seurantatietoa ja tuloksia voidakseen perustella omaa rahankäyttöään ja toimintaansa rahoittajilleen. Naisten lukutaidon edistäminen oli poliittisesti edullista useiden eri toimijoiden näkökulmasta.

Johtopäätöksenä voidaan todeta, että etelän kansalaisjärjestön näkökulmasta paikallinen konteksti ja siinä vallitsevien legitimiteettiin liittyvien odotusten täyttäminen on organisaation jatkuvuuden kannalta tärkeintä. Institutionaalisen kompleksisuuden vallitessa, eli tilanteessa, jossa on useita legitimiteettiyleisöjä, joiden odotukset ovat ristiriitaisia, järjestö voi hyödyntää tilannetta ja eri tahoilta saamaansa olemassaolon oikeutusta suhteessa muihin sidosryhmiin.

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