



**GIBSON, T.**

**Making Aid Agencies Work: Reconnecting INGOs with the People They Serve**

**2019. 1. vydanie [Fungovanie agentúr pre rozvojovú pomoc: Obnovenie spojenia medzi mimovládnyimi organizáciami a ľuďmi, ktorým slúžia]. Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019, 197 s. ISBN 9781787695122.**

Terry Gibson, an international development researcher, and activist, provides a critical behind-the-scenes assessment of a technocratic world which often lacks the voice, ideas, and experiences of the people International NGOs work for, in his new book, “Making Aid Agencies Work Reconnecting INGOs with the People They Serve“, gave. This book consists of an introduction, eight interrelated sections, and conclusions. It should be noted that each part of the book begins with a brief summary and the research questions which Gibson seeks an answer in his arguments. This proves very helpful for the reader as it allows you to move consistently and purposefully from one topic to another while reading.

Initially, Gibson presents the evolution of the INGOs industry quite reductively, presenting certain historical facts (such as the establishment of the Red Cross), distinguishing the three functions of INGOs (humanitarian response, service delivery, transformation). The author does not pay much attention to their description, although it can be found in the academic literature (Brown, Moore 2001) that INGOs perform multiple functions. In addition, it was useful to enrich the reader’s understanding by dividing the functions into old and new that emerged as the world transformed.

The author has examined the changing world through the dimension of cities functioning. According to Gibson, INGOs’ tools focus on rural work rather to growing cities in developing countries. In Asian countries, the formal and “informal” economies do intersect, creating the preconditions for creativity and risk for inhabitants of these cities. However, both INGOs staff and cities political and administrative elites learn through cooperation in joint projects, sharing knowledge and competencies (Burkšienė et. al. 2020).

Gibson provides a clear defence of employees in the aid industry. The book provides various excerpts from employees’ experiences from their blogs and articles in the press. He argues that the experiences of front-line employees are little known to the general public. For example, when states deal with the refugee crisis, little is known about the people who work with refugees and what conditions front-line employees have to live in. Gibson argues that

INGO staff cannot be blamed for the failures of programs/projects, arguing that this is due to the low level of local participation and the lack of learning from experience.

Gibson metaphorically admits that INGOs have become “big fish” by providing statistics on increasing amount of public donations to their budget. In 2016 alone, funding for the aid industry amounted to USD 60 billion. The author fears that the main focus of donors is not on helping the local population and making impact but only on how to ensure the accountability of INGOs. In analyzing aid agencies, it has become important for the author to examine INGOs’ small-scale goals, and more specifically how they are agreed upon and by whom. Gibson provides empirical examples from several states (Peru, Honduras) and presents a laconic but comparatively short theoretical discussion of situated knowledge, the power matrix, and what INGOs look like in this context. It is recognized that INGOs do not have grandiose goals and that these goals are usually small-scale. Finally, it becomes clear that a further vector of analysis of how local residents knowledge is used is where INGOs operates.

In a further discussion, the author focuses on the importance of local knowledge, which, Gibson argues, INGOs often do not make significant use of in their activities. Gibson gives the example of the village of Uhambinget in Africa, where residents can provide a shopping list that would actually improve their lives. A shopping list here means that rural residents have a clear list of items for INGO representatives to help in their lives such as nurses working in the village needing HIV screening equipment and a farmer for old tractor parts. In this perspective, the author proposes to change the structure of INGOs to one based on situational learning. The logic model of the projects (it is often used by planning intervention) is criticized as it is acknowledged that they have become a “buzzword” for aid industry employees. However, it is also known from the theory that logicmodels do not always provide logic and it is only a graphical way to depict how expected changes will take place. In addition, Gibson himself is clear that change in INGOs is difficult to implement. Author suggests that INGOs must enable their staff to learn, collaborate, and build partnerships, structures must be transparent, flexible, and have easier resources requirements. This will allow INGOs to make a responsible (able to build bridges with local partners either politicians or residents), open for dialogue, learning organization through the change by becoming change agency.

Summarizing the insights presented in the book, it can be stated that it is valuable, especially for donors who will learn experience from the target areas of their donations and INGO decision-makers, researchers and students. The book presents the problems of the aid industry and what do INGOs really do without any hidden meanings and anticipates where to move to improve billions of the people’s lives. Despite the book's stated advantages, there is a

lack of more serious analysis of INGOs' communication with both donors and recipients. Because effective communication management is a way to improve collaboration and coordination of joint actions (Burkšienė, Dvorak, 2022).

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