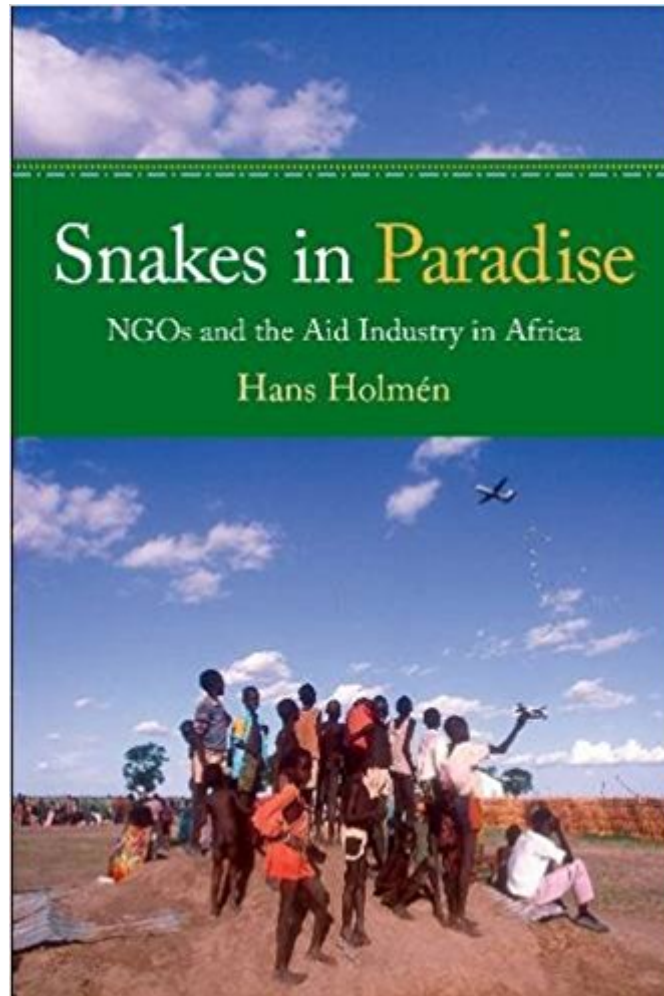




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# Snakes In Paradise: NGOs And The Aid Industry In Africa



## Synopsis

\* Questions many key assumptions about the efficacy of NGOs and civil society in development.\*

Provides suggestions on how to improve NGO performance and how NGOs can better link with local African initiatives and agendas. Beginning in the 1980s, sub-Saharan Africa witnessed a veritable explosion of NGOs and CSOs engaged in efforts to develop the subcontinent. Often praised for their commitment, flexibility, close contact with grassroots movements and marginalized groups, these organizations have become the darlings of donors and the UN system. During the same period, however, rural Africa has sunk deeper into poverty. The massive NGO engagement appears not to have made any meaningful progress. *Snakes in Paradise* breaks through the generalizations and neat theories to discover why these efforts have failed. Focusing especially on those local NGOs that are frequently overlooked by studies that cover the major international players, Holmström uncovers a NGO landscape that is considerably more ambiguous than the popular development literature would have people believe.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This book provides a thorough examination of the roles of NGOs and farmers' cooperatives in sub-Saharan African rural development in recent decades. More precisely, Holmström, a professor of social and economic geography at the University of Linköping in Sweden, has read widely in the relevant literature and uses that broad knowledge in this volume to

assay the roles of these entities in rural development. He also examines the differences and similarities between NGO and local development organization roles in west, southern, and eastern Africa that have emerged since 1982... this effort represents a valuable and welcome addition to the development literature." "Holmen provides us with a highly readable and discerning introduction to a complex and urgent issue, the role of African organizations in development. His approach is critical yet empathetic. His writing is elegant in its simplicity. His research is impeccable and his argument is powerfully persuasive, that, if development is to succeed, it must be self-organized from the bottom-up." "This is an essential book about African NGOs and development, with a particular focus on peasant organizations. It builds on the insight that organizations need to be understood as parts of their societies and bound by institutional context, rather than seen in isolation. Since HolmÃfÂ©n in addition avoids disciplinary hide-outs, this makes for a serious discussion about why environments often influence organizations more than vice versa. Read it!" "Skillfully demystifies the claim that NGOs present an alternative paradigm to African development. Contrasting the performance of NGOs in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) to their counterparts in West Africa, the author brings to light the important role of the environment and the context within which NGOs have evolved and developed... with compelling arguments and examples, the reader is persuaded to consider a possible new world where Africa is supported to build states, markets and truly indigenous organization. Highly recommended -- it will keep you interested up to the last page."

Hans HolmÃfÂ©n is an Associate Professor in Social and Economic Geography at the department of Water and Environmental Studies, University of LinkÃfÂ©ping, Sweden. He received his PhD at Lund University in 1991 and was promoted to Associate Professor in 1996. He joined LinkÃfÂ©ping University in 1997, where he teaches geography and development studies. HolmÃfÂ©n has been a member and board member of various NGOs in Sweden Ã¢â trade union, student union, consumer and housing cooperatives. He worked for a northern NGO in Jordan in the early 1980s and has conducted research on organizations and development since the 1980s. Since 2001, he has been a member of the African-Swedish research team Afrint, which combines micro- and macro-level studies to identify drivers of change in African agriculture ultimately aiming at enhanced agricultural productivity and improved food security in sub-Saharan Africa.

I can't recall another book where my ability to glean meaning changed so noticeably between the first and last chapter of the book. Chapter 1 rates a 1 (generous) and the last chapter a 4, thus my "3" rating. The first review on the back cover says the book is highly readable. Chapter 1 is 40 pages

long and reads like a poor university term paper: a patchwork of the ideas, and quotes, of others, duly referenced, lacking coherence. I count 59 references on pages 3-15 alone. From those pages I essentially learned that that NGOs might better be called COs and that the subject countries have had little success to date with NGOs. The last chapter, chapter 7, while also rich in references, offers many useful angles from which to consider NGO activity, and it is readable. To save time, consider reading the book from the last chapter forward, stopping when you find you can better spend your time elsewhere.

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