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THE POLITICS OF GOVERNMENT-NGO RELATIONS IN AFRICA

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BY

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ABSTRACT

Non-Government organizations (NGOs), deservedly or not, have established a reputation as the leading practitioners of the rural development in Africa. African governments have responded ambiguously to the presence of these new agencies, on the one hand valuing the economic resources NGOs can raise, but resisting political pluralization implied by popular development action. The paper describes the growth of NGOs in Africa and proposes a framework for analysing the dynamics of NGO-government relations. By means of examples drawn mainly from Kenya and Zimbabwe, the paper illustrates the strategies used by governments to exercise control and NGOs to assert autonomy. An argument is made that the contribution of NGOs to development, and the attitude of governments towards the voluntary sector, are determined more by political than economic considerations.

INTRODUCTION

In retrospect, the 1980s may turn out to be the "NGO decade" for rural development in Africa. Recent organizational performance seems to suggest that non-government organizations (NGOs) have a comparative advantage over international donor agencies, national governments and private firms when it comes to addressing the basic needs of the rural poor. There is growing evidence in the literature on the developmental role of the voluntary sector that NGOs can sometimes be effective at alleviating poverty and hunger. Operating with minimal resources on micro-projects in neglected regions, NGOs promise to strengthen rural people's abilities to improve their own conditions.

NGOs have entered the limelight as governments throughout Africa have begun to retreat from ambitious attempts to sponsor socioeconomic development "from above". After a quarter century of central planning and notwithstanding substantial investments in education and health services, African governments have shown limited capacity to raise rural standards of living. Under the combined pressure of growing international indebtedness and declining economic productivity, public services in the African countryside have actually begun to break down. The devastating African famines of 1974 and 1984 emphasised not only the apparent helplessness of some governments in the face of natural catastrophe, but also the centrality of non-government organizations as conduits for relief and development assistance. Especially in the remotest regions of the African countryside, governments have often had little choice but to cede responsibility for the provision of basic services to a church, an indigenous self-help group, or an international relief agency.

A change in the climate of debate about international development policy has also helped to thrust NGOs into prominence at this time. There is an unusual conjunction of ideas in which development theorists of diverse persuasions agree on the ineffectiveness of the State and the need for institutional alternatives. From a "left" perspective, proponents of popular participation in development perceive NGOs as an instrument of empowerment that will enable "beneficiaries" to take control of their own lives (Friere 1970; Hollnsteiner 1978; Gran 1983). Elements within this school are

disillusioned, not only with State sponsorship, but with "developmentalism" itself. They point to evidence that economic growth and industrialization is usually accompanied by dependence, impoverishment and marginalization. They consider that sustainable development can only be achieved on the basis of full political and economic participation by ordinary working folk.

At the same time, NGOs have also found favour from the "right" and have benefitted from the current fashion for the privatization of development interventions (Berg 1981; USAID 1982; USAID 1886a). During the 1980s, official bilateral aid agencies and multilateral lending institutions made assistance conditional upon the acceptance by host governments of "structural adjustment" policy reforms. Such reforms contain requirements for reduced economic intervention by governments and for the allocation of resources by market forces. While these donors may prefer the capitalist firm as the organizational model for a reinvigorated private sector, they have found that indigenous large-scale business enterprises are few and far between in Africa. The weakness of the private sector has led the development assistance community to explore the alternative of working through non-profit, voluntary institutions.

At the heart of these debates is the issue of the proper role of the State in civil society and in economic development. Where does responsibility rest for the well-being of a nation's people? And how might institutional arrangements be made for sharing the enormous task of rural development? At base, the relationship between governments and non-government organizations is a political question that impinges on the legitimacy of various types of institutions to exercise power. Who has the right to assert leadership, to organize people, and to allocate resources in the development enterprise?

The new prominence of NGOs naturally attracts the attention of public authorities. Whether NGOs are international or community-based, all operate within the boundaries of a nation-state and at the pleasure of a sovereign government. Because governments resist any reduction of their leadership role in development, they are likely to attempt to condition the context for voluntary sector activity, for example by enacting legal and

administrative regulations to control NGOs. On the other hand, NGOs are beginning to find themselves in a position to influence the way that governments conceptualize and implement development programs. The innovative NGO ideology challenges the conventional wisdom of "what works" and raises issues that are rightfully part of a public policy debate on rural development. Governments and NGOs therefore find themselves interacting in new ways that requires both parties to think carefully about how to handle any conflicts that might arise.

The present paper attempts to open a discussion about the political relations between governments and non-governmental development agencies. Following some introductory material, the paper is divided into two parts, one conceptual, the other empirical.

In Part One, I propose a framework for analysing government-NGO relations. I describe the different political and organizational characteristics of public and voluntary agencies with a view to understanding the dynamics that drive each type of institution. I subsequently identify the factors that affect the relations between governments and NGOs -- including the type of governance system and the type of voluntary activity. The key issue explored is the political tension between government's urge for order and control and the NGO quest for organizational autonomy.

Part Two applies this conceptual framework to an analysis of the prevalent trends in government control and NGO response in sub-Saharan Africa. I identify and describe the range of regulatory mechanisms actually employed by governments -- monitoring, coordination, cooptation, dissolution -- and the varieties of reaction that NGOs evince -- low profile, selective collaboration, and policy advocacy. A series of capsule case examples provides supporting empirical data, mostly from East and Southern Africa and notably from Kenya and Zimbabwe.

The Growth of NGOs

Africa has a long history of organized voluntary action which helps to explain the continent's receptivity to NGOs today. In precolonial times, political organization was integrated within a social network of

kinship obligations incurred through the structure of the extended family. Individuals were expected to share food, labour and productive assets with relatives and had a right in return to expect livelihood support from others while chiefs were able to compel commoners to till their fields -- that is, by calling upon the authority of the traditional State -- the most typical form of organization was voluntary and reciprocal exchange among equals.

During the colonial period, the State stood aloof from rural development and concentrated on the regulatory functions of maintaining law and order. Non-government organizations, in the form of churches and missionary societies, were the principal providers of health and education services, especially in the undeveloped hinterland. Only at the eleventh hour of colonial rule, in belated reaction to nationalist political agitation, did the State assume responsibility for development services. Government attitudes to NGOs in the colonial period ranged from laissez-faire to attempts to sever the links between the church mission system and the nationalist movement. Significantly, Africa's first modern NGOs sprang up during this period in the form of ethnic welfare associations which articulated the social demands of newly-urbanized Africans. Such NGOs formed the building blocks of nationalist political parties and played an explicitly political role in contesting the authority of the colonial government.

In the post-colonial period, NGO development programs have mushroomed. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) considers that up to 6,000 NGOs exist worldwide, though breakdowns of this figure by continent and country are difficult to come by (OECD, 1981; Gorman, 1984; InterAction, 1986). According to best estimates, more than 400 NGOs of all types operate in Kenya, up from 125 in 1974 (USAID, 1986b; KNCSS 1987). counting only those organizations that belong to official NGO coordinating bodies, there are at least 46 registered NGOs in Ethiopia, 94 in Uganda, and 80 in Zimbabwe (InterAction, 1989). In most African countries NGOs deliver a significant proportion of health services -- up to 35 percent in Kenya -- and are often the only service agencies operating in the remoter rural areas. During the widespread drought of the early 1980s, for example, indigenous and international NGOs mounted coordinated food relief efforts across the continent that predated similar government programs by many months.

The term "NGO" embraces a range of organizations of diverse scale and character. Three principal categories can be identified. First, there are community-based associations which have a small and intimate membership, are run by the members themselves, and rely on limited amounts of primarily local resources. Second, there are national NGOs whose small professional staffs provide support services -- in the form of management training, information exchange, or policy representation -- to the grassroots organizations below. Finally, there are international relief and development agencies which have large professional staffs, field offices in several countries, and worldwide budgets which compare in size with those of the smaller governments in Africa. For the purposes of this analysis, community-based and national NGOs will sometimes be referred to together as "indigenous" NGOs in order to jointly distinguish them from their "international" counterparts.

All types of NGOs have grown in numbers and scope as a result of a recent influx of foreign aid into the voluntary sector. The outpouring of public support for private charitable appeals like Band Aid/Live Aid for Africa and USA for Africa is only the most celebrated indicator of a shift in the way that aid resources are accumulated and delivered in the 1980s. Even as overall aid levels have declined in recent years, the amount of official bilateral assistance channelled through international NGOs has more than tripled, from \$332m in 1973 to 1.18 billion in 1983 (Smith 1987). The European Economic Community currently contributes over \$600 million annually via this route and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) directs a full 12 percent of its aid through NGO intermediaries (Brodhead, 1987). Even multilateral agencies like the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Bank are belatedly seeking NGO partners for the implementation of development projects and are encouraging government-NGO joint ventures. A total of \$1 billion is thought to have reached Africa through combined NGO channels in 1986 (Enabling Environment, 1986).

Having been "discovered" by the international development community, NGOs are becoming increasingly confident in asserting an alternative development strategy. David Korten argues that the most advanced NGOs have passed through the early stages of organizational evolution and have now

entered a third generation (1986, p.6-7). NGO development strategy has moved beyond the provision of emergency relief and social welfare services and beyond even the establishment of economically self-supporting development projects. Organizations are now attempting to "scale up", to professionalise staff, and to act as a catalyst among public, private and NGO agencies in creating a supportive environment for national development. NGOs are even beginning to gain a voice at the international level through global consortia and networks like the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA), the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW), and Development Innovations and Networks (IRED), all based in Europe. Important African contributions to the debate on international development policy include the "Declaration of NGOs on the African Economic and Social Crisis" at the special session of the United Nations in May 1986, and the formation of the continent-wide Forum of African Voluntary Development Organizations (FAVDO) in May 1987.

Whether NGOs can fulfill the expectations now placed on their shoulders remains to be seen. The claim that NGOs are more "effective" -- that is, able to attain stated goals -- than other forms of development organization is, of course, an empirical question. The evidence to date suggests that organized voluntary action can improve popular access to water and sanitation facilities, primary health services, and credit and management support to small-scale business enterprises (USAID 1986, Smith 1987). Moreover, awareness training among clients and participatory decision-making seem to contribute to the sustainability of this type of development activity. Hyden has made perhaps the most articulate and spirited case for NGOs in Africa in terms of their closeness to the grassroots, motivated field staff, and low-cost management style (1983, 119-123). Chambers adds that a key NGO advantage over government is the ability to act quickly (1987, p.1).

On the other hand, NGOs also suffer from a set of basic organizational weaknesses that inhibit the impact of their work. NGO projects are often isolated from one another and from planned government interventions, and are difficult to replicate in dissimilar environmental conditions. Moreover, "small" is usually expensive, and while NGO micro-projects may be relatively effective, they are also usually inefficient. There is a persistent shortage of skilled managers in the voluntary sector and a lack of

weaknesses

clarity about the management principles that underpin participatory modes of development. Finally, because research and evaluation are not always conducted, very little in the way of systematic learning is being gleaned from the NGO experience (CEC 1981; Smith 1987). In a telling critique of inflated claims for effectiveness, Judith Tandler has assembled evidence from Latin America that NGOs do not always deliver sustainable benefits or reach the very poorest (ch. Tandler, 1982; DAI, 1979). And Mutiso has questioned whether NGOs in Africa actually involve people in choices of technology, or merely serve as a conduit for pre-processed plans (1985, p.65).

Indeed, in Africa, NGOs face the danger of being oversold. The positive reputation of NGOs in this context has arisen by default -- as a response to the shortcomings of State intervention -- rather than from a systematic review of concrete accomplishments. Enthusiasm for NGO approaches must be tempered by the recognition that the organized voluntary sector in Africa is still extremely weak and dependent, even compared with other Third World countries. As Hyden reminds us, there are few indigenous organizations of any strength, most NGOs being local branches or affiliates of international organizations which rely heavily on outside funding (1983, 119). NGOs will find great difficulty in winning recognition from government as credible development actors for as long as they lack a solid domestic financial base. Indeed NGOs relate to African governments in a context of asymmetrical power.

The Issue: Who Leads Development?

The growth of NGO's poses a dilemma for the State. Should the public authorities encourage or discourage private institutional initiatives in rural development?

On the one hand, organized voluntary activity promises to contribute to the improvement of living standards, a developmental goal to which governments are themselves committed. At best, the delivery of NGO services to rural areas can reduce the weighty managerial and fiscal burden of providing service coverage on a nationwide basis. In most African countries, rural extension services operate only intermittently, if at all. Faced with

inadequate budgetary resources, extension agencies lack the material means to execute their programs and to pay personnel on time. As a result they encounter declining morale, staff defections, and a lack of organizational effectiveness. Under these circumstances it would appear to be in the public interest to encourage NGOs to serve the State in an auxiliary service role. Indeed, an incumbent political regime might stand to gain if NGOs can mobilize resources and deliver benefits to regions and classes that are otherwise unreachable.

On the other hand, effective NGO initiatives may reflect unfavourably on the government's performance at inducing rural development. During the nationalist struggle and from the outset of independence, political leaders held out the prospect of new opportunities and improved life chances for their followers. The very legitimacy of African governments has come to be predicated on the capacity to make good on promises of economic and social advancement. Governments are therefore loathe to admit that they have performed poorly because of the implication this holds for their right to hold power. They may be unwilling to allow credit for socioeconomic progress to accrue to any organization other than the State itself. Rather than regarding NGOs as allies in the development enterprise, leaders can come to distrust them as potential challengers in the realm of political leadership. At worst, NGOs which organize clients at the local level may sow seeds of political discontent from which opposition can be mounted against an incumbent regime.

The issue of government-NGO relations therefore raises fundamental questions about the balance between civil society and the State in Africa. In the West, voluntary associations played a formative role, not only in the accumulation of economic wealth, but as a crucible for forging an attachment to basic democratic values among the populace at large. Informed and active citizens organized into autonomous associations and representative bodies were sometimes able to provide a counterweight to the accumulation of excessive power by the State. In Africa, however, the sequence of institution-building has departed from this checked and balanced model. Political independence saw the intact transfer of an already large and strong ("overdeveloped") State from colonial to nationalist hands. Political leaders generally chose to use State power to attempt to weld together the ethnically-varied peoples within

their boundaries into some semblance of nationhood. The general trend has therefore been towards political and administrative centralization with independent organizations swept under the wing of the one-party State or abolished completely under military rule. Because popular democracy is not on the immediate agenda, the "pluralizing" contribution of NGOs is not necessarily valued or welcomed by the powers-that-be.

The relationship between governments and NGOs is further complicated by the fact that both operate in an international arena. In Africa, foreign assistance comprises a larger proportion of public revenues than in any other part of the world. Governments tend to welcome NGO initiatives that attract foreign resources as long as they are additional to existing flows of concessionary development capital. But political leaders can react negatively if donors begin to reallocate development assistance away from governments and in favour of NGOs. It is clear that international donors are increasingly enamoured of NGOs and often tout them as a flexible alternative to the bureaucratic rigidity of the State. The fact that this can have the effect of reducing official aid revenues does not endear NGOs to the authorities. In reality, the holdings of the national treasury may be unaffected if NGOs can relieve government of some of the burdens of service delivery. And if the claim is true that NGOs can do certain rural development jobs with greater efficiency than governments, then there may even be a net fiscal benefit.

But governments are likely to interpret shifts in funding patterns by foreign donors in political rather than economic terms. The control of resources, and the use of such control in building political support and staying in power, is more important to political leaders than the niceties of economic cost-benefit analysis. Foreign aid is such a lucrative source of largesse that the State is unlikely to allow it to slip easily from its grasp. Moreover, African governments also insist on the sovereign right to act as gatekeepers between organizations within their borders and agencies from the outside world. They are particularly sensitive to any implication that donors might seek to influence the choice of priorities in rural development or any other policy sphere. When issues of national sovereignty are at stake, governments are likely to scrutinize the international connections of NGOs with particular care.

PART ONE

A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING GOVERNMENT NGO-RELATIONS

Governments and NGOs are separate species of organization. Crudely stated, the organizational imperative of the State is administrative command and control, whereas NGOs seek to inculcate autonomous and participatory action. Because all institutions are complex structures, and the actors within them are driven by mixed motives, such a characterization may be overdrawn. But, in order to better understand the dynamics of government-NGO relations, it is worth extracting for analytical purposes the distinctive objectives and methods, structures and cultures of each type of organization.

The basic function of government, in Africa or elsewhere, is to impose and maintain order. Because Africa contains the newest of nations, the problem of forging unified control over a national territory is perhaps more pressing and intractable than in any other world region. Even if a government professes a developmentalist ideology -- as all African governments do -- their first responsibility is to maintain the integrity and security and national realm. In situations where the values of governability and development run counter to one another, the public authorities are bound to opt for the former.

In the quest for political order, most African governments have endeavored to eliminate independent centers of power. The universal trend to centralization represents an attempt by political leaders to enclose an unruly political environment within the confines of a unified set of manageable political institutions. Where they exist, organizations like labour unions, agricultural cooperatives and professional associations have usually been coopted and contained within a corporatist form of political monopoly. The State has often attempted to preempt the formation of independent associations by setting up alternatives of its own: for example, the cooperative movement in most parts of Africa is sponsored from above, usually by a Ministry of Cooperatives; local development committees are mandated for every rural administrative unit, usually according to a blueprint drawn up, not by the Ministry of Planning, but -- illustrating the excesses of overcentralization -- by the Office of the President.

Because they distrust independent initiative, African governments have too often fallen back on regulation as a mechanism for propelling change in the countryside. Following colonial precedents, African governments have used legal authority to mandate changes in such basic institutions as rural land use patterns and agricultural markets. The State justifies these changes in terms of benefit for rural residents but, on closer examination, reform often turns out to be structured for the convenience of the authorities: village consolidation schemes, for example, have usually been designed to ease central planning and service delivery; agricultural prices and levies have been set to swell the coffers of the national treasury. Far from capitalizing on rural folks' genuine desire to develop themselves, the African State has usually relied on standardized regulations that have discouraged voluntary initiative and led to popular disillusionment.

Notwithstanding ideological commitments to popular mobilization, official policy has usually contributed to a shrinking of the civic arena and a tightening of political control. Electoral reforms in postcolonial Africa have been consistently aimed at reducing popular participation and guaranteeing continuity for incumbents. Administrative reforms to decentralize development planning have usually served only to strengthen the technical authority of government field officers over the local resource allocation process. Indeed, the principal task of centrally-appointed officials is to contain and manage local demands. Because African governments favour a controlled and predictable political environment, they end up legitimizing and protecting the status quo. With few exceptions, the trend in national governance in Africa over the last thirty years has been conservative. In the effort to demonstrate authority, African governments have too often fallen into the trap of authoritarianism.

By contrast, developmental NGOs display a set of characteristics that run counter to this Statist model.

Governments and NGOs differ partly by definition, since voluntary agencies identify themselves as "non-governmental" as a way of distinguishing their approach from that of the public sector. While some writers object to

the designation "non-government" as a negative and contentless label (Fowler 1985), I find it a valuable descriptor for the purposes of this paper. In an important sense NGOs can be defined in terms of their commitment to organizational autonomy. They see themselves as owing allegiance to no vested interest but, instead, claim a direct relationship with social groups and movements. Even if they cannot deliver, NGOs promise an alternative to entrenched and bureaucratic methods of doing development. And, in a sector where organizations are weak and fragmented, complete autonomy is never feasible or desirable. Yet voluntary organizations still find it useful to define their identity in terms of independence from the dominant institutional presence and practices of the State.

All NGOs -- whether community-based, national or international -- share to some degree the organizational principle of voluntarism. Voluntary effort can take the form of collective labour on community projects in the poor countries or public fund-raising appeals in the industrialized world. The concept of voluntarism cuts across the common distinction between "membership organizations" that help themselves and "service organizations" that help others (Leonard, 1982). Whatever its form and scale, voluntarism → sets NGOs apart. Public and private agencies are organized according to different principles: the exercise of authority and the pursuit of profit respectively. Together with other non-profit service agencies -- like universities, churches, and unions -- the NGO community might even be said to constitute a "third sector" (Esman and Uphoff, 1984). In practice, of course, NGOs are not sustained by voluntarism alone; in order to survive, they may come to depend on donor resources rather than spontaneous self-help effort; and in order to grow, they often have to engage in income-generating activities or build professional bureaucracies. But NGO leaders tend to set basic organizational objectives and recruit and motivate staff on the basis of a shared core belief in the value of unrewarded public service.

The NGO approach is also mobilizational: it seeks to stimulate and release popular energies in support of community goals. While practice does not always live up to ideology, NGOs are generally more likely than governments to work with the poor and disadvantaged elements in society.

Since some NGO programs begin with disaster relief, their clientele is often composed of refugees or displaced persons with no permanent home or visible means of support. Alternatively, NGO clients may specifically target their program on "difficult" areas of the countryside far from administrative headquarters or in inhospitable agro-ecological zones; or they seek out women or members of minority ethnic groups. While NGOs were once guilty of paternalism and welfarism, almost all now see community organization and popular participation as essential ingredients of sustainable development. The most progressive NGOs rely on radical analyses of the political economy of poverty and techniques of awareness-raising and conscientization. "Third generation" NGOs are particularly likely to hold political empowerment and policy voice as central tenets. They no longer regard themselves as direct providers of material assistance but as development educators and capacity builders whose task is to enable the poor to demand social justice for themselves.

NGO concerns for poverty alleviation, political liberation and social justice reflect the generally forward-looking orientation of NGO leadership and staff. Experimentation in programming tends to challenge the standard operating procedures of government agencies. The NGO approach therefore tends to attract personnel from a background in the religious left and the Gandhian pacifism. Only gradually is the gospel of liberation theology penetrating the mainstream Christianity in Africa, through progressive individuals in the Catholic church and through the social responsibility programs of national affiliates of the World Council of Churches. NGOs help to provide a home for new ideas and to legitimize them so that they are not immediately branded as subversive. And, as institutions emerge that offer work for social transformation as a professional option, adherents of minority viewpoints can find opportunities for employment and expression that would otherwise be closed by the State.

Factors affecting Government-NGO Relations

Precisely because governments and NGOs are organized differently and use contrasting approaches to rural development, they are likely, at times, to come into conflict. Massoni has argued that, in practice, "most governments

cooperate with most NGOs" (1985). This observation holds true for Africa where the two parties have generally been able to work out a mutually acceptable modus vivendi. While governments and NGOs in Africa may not succeed in entirely eradicating institutional competition and mutual suspicion, they are usually able to avoid open conflicts that debilitate the national rural development effort.

In a continent as diverse and rapidly changing as Africa, government-NGO relations naturally vary from place to place and from time to time. The amount of operational space available to the voluntary sector depends on the interaction of particular governments with specific NGOs. Since the generic characteristics of the two types of organization sketched above cannot capture all the nuances of individual cases, it is necessary to look more closely at certain ideographic aspects of institutional performance.

As before, let us look first at the government side.

Much depends on the nature of the governance system. States with civilian constitutions that provide for freedom of association are more likely to tolerate NGO activity than military or martial law regimes. Multiparty systems, few as they are in Africa, are likely to be more hospitable to NGOs than governments which are still in the process of consolidating power in a single-party state. And to the extent that informal political influence determines the actual distribution of political and economic rewards, politicians are likely to welcome NGOs as an additional source of spoils for distribution. NGOs are therefore likely to find encouragement in countries where political parties are weak and politics is conducted along personalistic and patronage lines.

To a lesser extent, the prevailing policy regime also influences the space available for voluntary organization. One would expect that governments which adopt a liberal economic policy -- for example an International Monetary Fund structural adjustment package -- are more likely to encourage independent NGO entrepreneurship. Indeed, foreign funders play a crucial role in creating a favourable climate for NGO activity, both through the general leverage of "policy dialogue" and through decisions to support individual NGOs. Contrary

to expectations. African regimes with a left-of-center commitment to "peoples' power" are not necessarily likely to welcome like-minded NGOs within their borders. The leaders of such regimes usually claim to have a genuine understanding of popular aspirations and see no need for NGO auxiliaries to perform the mass mobilization role of the vanguard party.

Host
country,
Kenya

Finally, the administrative capacity of the State determines the extent to which NGOs are free to operate unhindered. While political leaders may intend to regulate the NGO sector they may find it difficult to do so. Because NGO activities are small in scale and geographically scattered, governments may find it costly to keep track of everything that is going on. As will be evident from the illustrative examples presented below, government-NGO relations in African countries go through periodic "crises" in which government officials take offence at some aspect of NGO activity, resolve publicly to crack down, but then find it difficult to enforce corrective measures.

There are also variations on the NGO side which influence the equation of government-NGO relations.

The first factor is the extent of NGO activity. Where the NGO sector is small, government can easily choose to overlook it as unimportant; as it grows, however, is it likely to inquire into NGO activity within their jurisdiction if they sense that the NGO sector is growing uncontrollably and without full official knowledge. Growth of the NGO sector is likely to be swiftest in countries which serve as nodes for surrounding countries and where international NGOs establish regional field offices to serve a wider African sub-region.

The degree of government control is critically determined by the geographical location of NGO operations within a host country. Because African nations are ethnically diverse, and because minority groups may live in border areas abutting hostile neighbouring States, governments often have very good reason to fear fragmentation of the polity. Opposition to central government in Africa is usually based on sub-national identity leading to political conflict in the form of irredentism, destabilization or guerrilla

warfare. Because NGOs work with neglected or marginal groups -- including those who live in disputed territories -- they run the risk of becoming embroiled in national political disputes. And those NGOs which work with refugees or engage in cross-border relief operations can touch upon sensitive issues of the international relations among African states. Similarly, NGOs can expect a hostile reception from governments if they choose to locate activities in regions where resistance movements are engaged in armed conflict. Indeed, NGOs generally find more latitude to operate near a capital city or in a national heartland than from a remote rural base.

apologetic ?

Of equal importance, governments take account of the content of NGO programs. Most rural development activities are non-controversial: most people concur that child immunization, clean water, agricultural production and road-building are desirable innovations in rural Africa. Governments and NGOs may differ over the methods of service delivery and choice of beneficiaries but such disagreements rarely lead to a political impasse. There is another set of development activities, however, which can set governments and NGOs on a collision course. Certain progressive NGOs argue that equitable economic development cannot take place unless governments put in place a foundation of political and legal preconditions. Of primary importance is the observance of universal human rights, in terms particularly of civil and political liberties. In practice, NGOs that specialize in human rights advocacy have been slow to gain access and take root in Africa. The explanation rests with sensitivity of African governments to the barest hint of negative international publicity about the management of domestic dissent.

This point brings us back to the confounding impact of the wider environment in which governments and NGOs find themselves.

Take, for example, the effects of funding source. All types of NGOs -- international, national and community-based -- are heavily dependent on grants from foreign donors. One estimate suggests that intermediate NGOs in Kenya receive 90 percent of their annual operating expenses from abroad (Mwangi, 1986). Governments respond to this unhealthy situation in ambiguous ways. On the one hand, the authorities welcome additional resources for the development effort; on the other hand they are concerned that NGOs are

accountable to, and may act as proxies for, foreign interests. Ironically, the government position may be equally equivocal in relation to locally-generated funds. On paper, most African governments are committed to the principle of self-reliance through local resource mobilization. In practice, governments become concerned about local fund-raising efforts if contributors represent a particularistic community. Sub-national development associations have lately begun to emerge in Africa as a means of building support for development in a given ethnic or regional locality. Headed by prominent political leaders, these associations raise money from town dwellers to support health and education projects back home. Perhaps mindful that regionally-based "welfare societies" were effective at political mobilization against colonial regimes, Africa's contemporary leaders tend to discourage such activity.

In sum, the very existence of NGOs is a test of a government's stance on a basic issue of national governance: how to balance organizational autonomy and political control. Because NGO activities can involve a wide range of sensitive political actors -- donors in the international arena, neighbouring countries in the region, and social groups within its own territory -- a government may even come to see the existence of NGOs in national security terms. The more fragile a government's sense of political legitimacy, the less permissive it is likely to be towards the institutionalization of a strong voluntary sector. Where governments are not confident of their grip on power they are likely to fear a populace mobilized in autonomous organizations and to favour regulation and control. As argued earlier, the amount of space allowed to NGOs in any given country is therefore determined first and foremost by political considerations, rather than by any calculation of the contribution of NGOs to economic and social development.

PART TWO

STRATEGIES OF AUTONOMY AND CONTROL

In practice, how do governments enforce control and NGOs assert autonomy in sub-Saharan Africa? Can we discern any regular patterns of organizational behavior? Are governments or NGOs relatively more effective at structuring their mutual relationship along preferred lines? Can autonomy and control be reconciled in constructive patterns of collaboration in rural development?

Strategies of Government Control

Governments can invoke an array of regulatory instruments -- laws, administrative rules, political pressures -- to ensure that NGOs comply with national norms and standards. This discussion below outlines four regulatory mechanisms that African governments commonly use and which are arrayed below on an ascending scale of government control. It should be noted that governments generally try gentle forms of regulation before resorting to heavy-handed intervention. Such official restraint may reflect a philosophy of regulation that "less is best", or a pragmatic admission that tight and systematic control of NGOs is beyond the ailing capacity of a "retreating" African State.

Monitoring

Governments are able to restrict the size of the NGO sector by monitoring the registration of organizations. In order to transact business, NGOs require a legal identity, for which they must apply for registration under a legal statute. Government officials usually have a degree of discretion in deciding whether or not allow an NGO to be established within the jurisdiction of the State. African governments have sometimes declined or delayed permission for international NGO agencies to open field offices if relations with the NGO's home government are strained. Some governments, for example in Somalia, view any kind of voluntary association as a potential political threat and therefore discourage NGO formation and registration.

Governments can use the moment of registration, as well as regular reporting requirements, to gather information on voluntary agencies. In Ethiopia, for example, the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission maintains

detailed records on the agencies that are present in the country, their location, and their accomplishments. In reality, however, most African governments lack reliable data. They have demonstrated a limited capacity to undertake even rudimentary monitoring, such as counting the numbers of NGOs and the amounts of foreign funding they bring in, even though such information is fundamental to national development planning. Most governments simply require annual after-the-fact reports on projects supported by NGOs. Foreign donors or NGOs themselves have usually taken the lead in producing directories of NGOs numbers and services. And, in Kenya in 1985, the Ministry of Finance actually applied to a foreign donor for support to establish a basic inventory of the NGOs within its borders!

The problem of weak monitoring can be partly traced to divided lines of legal and administrative responsibility within the public service. Governments have no standardized format by which indigenous NGOs make their presence known: welfare organizations register with the Ministry of Social Services; Cooperatives with the Ministry of Cooperatives; non-profit companies with the Ministry of Commerce; and certain religious NGOs are entirely exempt from registration since they fall under the aegis of a church. Moreover, international NGOs, rather than registering under legal statute, operate under memoranda of agreement with relevant sectoral Ministries and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And, where the Ministry of Finance takes an interest in foreign NGOs for purposes of exchange control and taxation regulations, a whole range of other government units are responsible for partial aspects of NGO activity ranging from customs clearance for imported goods to security clearance for technical assistance personnel. In short, NGO contacts with government are scattered over a wide institutional front. Few African governments have set up a central clearing house through which to conduct exhaustive and reliable monitoring.

Sheffield has therefore suggested that governments should establish simple and transparent procedures for NGO registration and reporting (1987, 24). It is certainly difficult to see how the authorities can hold NGOs publicly accountable in the absence of such basic measures. NGO managers commonly complain about the unnecessary complexities of dealing with many arms of government but, in practice, they oppose the centralization of monitoring

capacity. The prevailing situation -- in which there is blurred responsibility and poor communication among government agencies -- suits NGOs since it leaves them with room for maneuver. While government capacity to monitor NGO activities would almost certainly be enhanced by single point of contact, the establishment of a powerful central agency has usually fallen victim to jurisdictional struggles within the public bureaucracy. Since many agencies have a claim to monitor some aspect of NGO activity, it has usually proved impossible for the contenders to agree on who should take the lead.

In Zimbabwe in 1987, for example, there were at least three government ministries vying over the right to screen the establishment and programs of indigenous intermediate and community-based NGOs. The Ministry of Labour, Culture and Social Services held traditional responsibility for administering the Societies Act under which most NGO's are registered in Zimbabwe. Yet two new Ministries, created since independence in 1980, claimed Authority to monitor rural development NGOs: The Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs which oversees grassroots development initiatives, and the Ministry of Cooperative Development which is charged to promote cooperative forms of development organization. Senior officials in both Ministries claimed that their office alone could approve NGO programs in rural development and that the other office was over-reaching its legitimate responsibilities. A similar situation prevailed in Kenya where the compilation of basic data on NGOs is the subject of "turf" struggles between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Culture and Social Services. The issue required the formation of an interministerial committee which, through the Office of the President in June 1987, suspended all NGO registration until standardized procedures could be worked out.

Coordination

Despite this sort of organizational incoherence within the public service officials often state that "coordination" is the goal of State intervention in the NGO sector. Because a government's development responsibilities are national in scope, planners usually try to spread investments evenly across the country. By contrast, most NGO projects are small-scale, location-specific, and have marginal spread effects beyond a

favoured project site. African governments correctly see the voluntary sector as diverse and fragmented and often charge that NGOs contribute to haphazard patterns of rural development. The Minister of Local Government in Zimbabwe, for example, described NGOs as "unguided missiles" whose activities do not necessarily contribute to the objectives of national development plan. If NGOs are permitted to start development activities by whim or fancy, there is a danger that scarce development resources will be wasted. Rational planning through a formal framework, coordinated from a central vantage point, holds out the promise of even service coverage and the avoidance of duplication.

But coordination cuts both ways. While there is obvious benefit in government laying down policy guidelines for NGOs, government can also be excessively rigid and ponderous in its requirements. Experience suggests that the quest for coordination often ends in over-centralized decision-making, bureaucratic delay, and the suffocation of badly-needed private initiative. The most effective exchange and coordination often occurs below the national level between community-based organizations and front-line officials. Indeed, for small voluntary agencies working at the grassroots, the government is personified by a local extension worker or a district administrative official.

Governments in Africa have generally been committed, at least in principle, to administrative decentralization in order to ensure that local priorities are included in national development plans. Such reforms designate lower level administrative entities, such as provincial or district development committees, as the appropriate forum for coordinated planning. In Kenya, the District Focus strategy inaugurated in July 1983 empowers District Development Committees to review -- and accept or reject -- all NGO project proposals. In Zimbabwe, in accordance with the Prime Minister's directive on administrative decentralization in February 1984, NGOs are required to seek clearance from the District Administrator before entering any district with a development project. In both instances, the government has asserted a prerogative to decide who and what to fund.

Government efforts to coordinate NGO programs into official planning processes have therefore tended to focus at the district level. This is

entirely appropriate since most NCO programs are field-based and often cover no more than a single district. For the most part, civil servants remain sceptical of the contribution of NCOs to rural development seeing little role for them beyond the provision of external funding. There may even be institutional jealousy and competition between impoverished public extension agencies and relatively well-funded NGOs. Local politicians, like Members of Parliament and District Councillors who are influential on District Development Committees, sometimes block NGO projects or attempt to divert them to their own home areas within the district. Yet local politicians have generally been quicker than public servants to recognize the potential development contribution of NGOs, and lobby actively for access to the resources they control.

The degree of coordination between government and NGO plans for rural development depends in large part on the extent to which the central government is willing to engage in real decentralization reforms. African leaders have usually lacked the political will to meaningfully alter the balance of decision-making power between center and locality by involving rural folk in development planning, budgeting and evaluation. In Zimbabwe, for example, district planners control no budgets of their own and remain timid of making decisions that may be countermanded from above. The Government of Kenya has implemented a more thorough deconcentration of power, but even by 1987 the District Development Committees enjoyed direct control over only 6 per cent of the nation's annual fiscal resources. A great deal depends on individuals. While most Kenyan District Commissioners have taken advantage of decentralization reforms to assert their own enhanced authority, others have made genuine efforts to consult NCO representatives in drawing up district plans. If it occurs at a low level in the administrative hierarchy, then government-led coordination efforts may enhance both local participation and the efficiency of resource allocation.

Cooptation

"Coordination" implies the synchronization of activities among independent organizations, whereas "cooptation" is a firmer form of control in which autonomous organizations are captured and guided by a superordinate

agency. African governments have employed the strategy of cooptation through the establishment of quangos (quasi-NGOs) to regulate voluntary sector activity. A quango is a publicly-sponsored NGO which is an organizational affiliation to a government Ministry. For our purposes, the best examples are the National Councils of Social Service that exist in Kenya, Uganda and Zambia, among other Commonwealth African countries. The director and staff of a National Council are appointed by the Minister responsible for social services and the core revenue of the Council comes from the national Treasury. All NGOs with social welfare activities are required to become members, some are elected to the governing board, and the Council is intended to become their mouthpiece to government. Through the provision of sub-grants to NGOs, Councils seek to guide voluntary sector efforts that supplement government's direct programs in social welfare.

A related model of institutional cooptation is exemplified by the Community Development Trust Fund of Tanzania (CDTF). While registered as a non-profit voluntary association, the CDTF is nonetheless governed by a Board of Trustees predominantly composed of senior political officials, including the Prime Minister as Chairman and Minister of Finance as Treasurer. Its objective is to stimulate and support self-help development efforts at the community level. Since the early 1980s the CDTF budget has been funded entirely out of donor contributions, though the government does attach technicians to serve CDTF projects at the grassroots. Indeed, CDTF serves as broker between international and indigenous NGOs as an official conduit for foreign support to the voluntary sector. On one hand, this intimate arrangement with government has sometimes facilitated the work of NGOs in Tanzania, for example by easing access to tax and import duty exemptions. On the other hand, because government and party officials exercise tight central control over the allocation of voluntary sector resources, NGOs have been relatively slow to arise in Tanzania or to enter from abroad.

Even where the NGO community sets up its own umbrella organizations, the government can still influence their behavior. The Government of Togo, for example, "invited" Le Conseil des Organisations Non-Gouvernementales du Togo (CONGAT), to help mesh NGO initiatives with government policy, an offer which the NGOs felt bound to accept. In Kenya, the governing party gradually

exerted control over an umbrella organization of women's groups known as Maendeleo ya Wanawake by incorporating it into the party structure. And in Zimbabwe, debates about the need for a national representative institution for the women's movement were effectively preempted by an announcement that the ruling ZANU-PF party intended to set up a Women's Council.

Despite these efforts at cooptation, African governments can claim little lasting success. National Councils have generally lacked the resources to become effective agents of government and to win allegiance and legitimacy from an NGO clientele. Starved of public funds, Councils have never been able to win NGO confidence as a reliable partner in program development. From its formation in 1964, for example, the Kenya National Council for Social Services found difficulty in making sub-grants to member NGOs, which led -- not unexpectedly -- to a lapse in member interest. Moreover, the voluntary sector in Africa has grown and changed so quickly over the past couple of decades that government umbrella bodies have been unable to keep pace. Their social welfare orientation is perceived as anachronistic by the new development-oriented NGOs; and where policy debate is beginning, NGOs regard official sponsorship as an obstacle to the accurate articulation of their views. As Stromlau notes, a dominant role by government may even lead to divisions and conflicts because members have not had the advantage of determining the purpose and activities of the supervising body (1987, 5).

Dissolution

The strategy described here as "dissolution" is a convenient shorthand for a range of government interventions to impede the functions of autonomous organizations. Governments can mandate a wide range of measures to limit an NGOs freedom of action, with the forced closure of the organization as the most severe step.

African governments have not hesitated to restrict specific NGO activities where these have been judged contrary to the national interest. In Zimbabwe in 1983, for example, the government required the Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP), the only indigenous service NGO in rural Matabeleland, to shut down its regional training center. The government apparently deemed the development education activities of this popular

organization to be too sensitive in the context of regional resistance by ethnic minority "dissidents". And during the general election campaign in 1985, the Zimbabwe government banned all non-official meetings throughout the country, effectively disrupting the work of every rural-based NGO for a three-month period. During the droughts in Ethiopia, the government's Relief and Rehabilitation Commission has repeatedly intervened to prevent the delivery of relief supplies to rebel-held areas in Eritrea and Tigre. And the governments of Uganda, Kenya and Somalia have at various times outlawed the use of radios by NGOs to communicate between capital city headquarters and upcountry project sites.

In other cases, governments have intervened to harass individual leaders or to reorganize the internal governance of an NGO. The cooperative movement in Africa has been regularly subject to official interventions to replace despotic managers or to correct corrupt practices, often for good reason. On other occasions, overzealous government officials have used legal power to undermine effective NGO programs that appear too powerful or independent. In 1985 the Saving Development Movement (SDM), a grassroots women's movement in rural Zimbabwe, was brought to a standstill when the Registrar of Cooperatives made accusations of financial mismanagement. Even though the courts ultimately ruled in SDM's favour, the government was able to replace the leaders of the savings movement, dissolve its support service wing, and attach its assets. Because of the dispute, the grassroots activities of women's savings groups were disrupted and the future of a proven method for achieving financial self-reliance was called into question. Under these circumstances, political intervention by the State clearly inhibited rural economic development.

Governments have visited even more drastic measures, such as detention without trial under public security regulations, on the leaders of indigenous human rights NGOs in Africa. In Zaire, for example, the government has repeatedly stymied efforts to establish an advocacy body for citizen's rights by imprisoning activists. In 1986 the Zimbabwe government briefly detained the Chairman and Director of the Local Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace on suspicion of providing information to Amnesty international. And in 1987, President Museveni invoked the Public Order and

Security Act to detain the Secretary-General of the Uganda Human Rights Activists following outspoken comments in the international press about alleged government atrocities.

On balance, however, it is perhaps remarkable how rarely African governments have resorted to the extreme measure of actually dissolving NGOs. There are very few cases of governments requiring international NGOs to pack up and leave an African country. Perhaps the best publicized such case occurred in 1985 (ch) when the Government of Ethiopia expelled the field staff of *Medicins sans Frontier* (MSF), a European medical relief agency. The precipitating event was MSF's publication of a report criticizing the government policy of population resettlement which claimed that the motivation for the program was political rather than developmental and which documented harsh conditions and official mismanagement in the resettlement camps. In 1987, the Government of Sudan, headquartered in the Islamic north of the country, threatened to close down sixteen international NGOs with operations in the Christian and secessionist south. At the time of writing, the issue had not been finally resolved, but the number of NGOs involved had been reduced to three, two of which -- Lutheran World Relief and World Vision -- were lobbying hard to stay, and only one -- Association of Christian Resource Organizations Serving Sudan (ACROSS) -- seemed likely to be banned for allegedly providing assistance to an anti-government guerrilla movement.

In general, African governments have been more liable to dissolve indigenous than international NGOs, perhaps because the repercussions are easier to manage in a purely domestic arena. In Tanzania President Nyerere outlawed the Ruvuma Development Association (RDA) which had taken, perhaps too seriously, his own "ujamaa" dictum to form peasant associations based on cooperation and self-reliance. When RDA developed its own constitution and declined to appoint local party and bureaucratic officials to its management committee, the government intervened to dissolve it. In Kenya, the government has required ethnic welfare associations with sectionalist political ambitions to disband. And in Zambia, the public authorities have engaged in a long running battle with the local branches of the Jehovah's Witnesses which culminated in the banning of the organization in 1968 (ch). Despite the Witnesses' strong record of small-scale rural entrepreneurship, the government

was outraged that the movement's followers would not pledge allegiance to the secular authority of the State.

Dissolution remains a rarely-used strategy, perhaps because governments are wary of threatening the contribution to development of the voluntary sector as a whole. When one NGO comes into conflict with government, relations of all other NGOs often become tense. Senior government officials have been known to use the media or to call national meetings of NGO heads to warn against meddling in internal political or security affairs. But even so, NGOs have usually found it possible, once the storm has blown over, to return to business as usual.

Strategies of NGO Autonomy

While NGO managers value autonomy as a cardinal organizing principle of voluntary action, they also recognize that NGOs do not operate in a vacuum. As de Graaf has argued, NGOs are not "systems on their own" but are integrated into a wider political and administrative environment over which they have limited influence and even less control (de Graaf 1987; Smith, 1980). The post-colonial African State is the largest and most assertive actor in this environment and -- even though it too may have limited control -- NGOs must take account of State actions. Complete organizational autonomy is impossible and may not even be desirable. On occasion, NGO's may wish to enter a dialogue with government, either to enlist government support in broadening and sustaining developmental impact or to influence the direction of public policy. The strategies adopted by African NGOs to achieve these objectives are listed below in descending order of organizational autonomy.

Low Profile

Some NGOs see government as implacably incompetent or hostile to popular development efforts and have sought to avoid or work around it. This strategy can best be described as keeping a "low profile". Given the vastness of the African countryside and the scattered population distribution, NGOs find it relatively easy to operate in the interstices where the state

machinery does not reach. The most autonomous forms of NGO organizations are usually found at the local level where small community groups can organize on a base of local resources. There is a wealth of spontaneous and collective voluntary action in African rural areas which takes the form of food and artisanal production, local marketing and community improvement projects. Because the community-based organizations that promote such informal activity are legally unregistered, their activities are not monitored by administrative officials or documented by planners and researchers.

Even when community-based groups begin to reach up into wider markets, they are sometimes able to bypass the unpredictable service institutions of the State. African peasant farmers are well aware, for example, that if they rely on official agricultural marketing agencies, that fertilizer and seeds may be delivered late or that there may be delays in receiving payment for crop sales. They therefore tend to look for alternative institutional channels that perform more reliably. One such alternative is the network of Christian mission stations that span African rural areas with secular outreach programs to support health, education and agriculture. The churches often recruit their own development technicians and front-line animators that operate alongside -- or instead of -- government extension staff. The scope of church programs is often localized or restricted to parishioners, but taken together, they constitute a parallel service delivery system to that of the State.

Generally speaking, indigenous community-based NGOs are more likely to attempt to operate in isolation from government than are international NGOs. Indeed international NGOs, highly sensitive to the niceties of diplomatic protocol, bend over backwards to comply with government entry, registration and operational requirements. This is not to say that international NGOs have never been driven to construct parallel delivery systems -- indeed this is standard operating procedure for NGO relief efforts in emergency situations -- but they are usually reluctant to see such structures institutionalized. Nor does a low NGO profile always conflict with official development preferences. Governments are likely to welcome NGOs that can conduct effective development programs without insisting on ownership and publicity. In other words, low profile NGOs that are willing to submerge their identity and allow the

government to take credit for development are welcome in official circles.

Moreover, NGOs with programs in ticklish areas such as human rights or social justice often find it expedient to adopt a low profile for purposes of protection. On the one hand, like the Justice and Peace Commission in Zimbabwe, this might mean cultivating close behind-the-scenes reporting ties to senior officials and scrupulously reserving negative publicity for instances in which the government does not respond. On the other hand, like the Public Law Institute in Kenya, it might mean concentrating on relatively less controversial areas of rights representation, such as consumer and environmental affairs. By contrast, the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK) discovered the damaging costs of a high profile stance in 1986. At that time the Council voiced public opposition to a Presidential declaration that primary elections for Parliament would be conducted by open "queuing" rather than by secret ballot. The President condemned the church's assertion of freedom of expression as unwarranted political interference and shut down the previously open lines of communication between church and State.

Selective Collaboration

NGOs resist coordination. To a greater or lesser extent all NGOs regard their own development programs as unique and are reluctant to accommodate themselves to the requirements of other agencies. Not only governments, but also national and international NGO umbrella bodies, thus find development NGOs to be a particularly idiosyncratic and unruly community.

Yet NGO interests are sometimes served by surrendering a measure of autonomy and selectively collaborating with other NGOs and with government. As small organizations acting alone, NGOs have limited impact. Unlike governments, NGOs usually lack the structure and resources to expand an effective rural development experiment beyond the enclosed boundaries of an initial project site. The transition from micro-project to macro-program forces NGOs to undertake operations of a nature and scale for which they are managerially ill-equipped. Governments, by contrast, are organized on a national scale and, while their reach may not be deep, it is usually broad,

with at least a nominal presence in every administrative district. The challenge for NGOs is to gain access to larger amounts of resources for program replication, without at the same time allowing governments to "dilute, distort or destroy whatever is good in the technology or method" (Korten, 1986). But rather than mechanically attempting expansion for its own sake, NGOs must be careful to identify the correct lessons from pilot projects --- what works where, and why --- and adapt programs accordingly.

Selective collaboration between NGOs and government is best worked out among field staff at local level. In practice, government extension workers often work closely with community groups on projects that are supported financially or technically by NGOs. Often such projects will be the most visible evidence of development activity in a locality and government workers may even display them as their own showpieces. The dividing line between government and voluntary initiative thus becomes blurred. Ideally, NGO and government workers negotiate a division of labour in the locality which capitalises on the comparative advantage of each agency. Whereas NGOs are good at mobilizing and organizing community groups, government is often better equipped to undertake technical tasks. Both sets of function are required for the integrated and multifaceted task of rural development.

Interesting examples of selective collaboration between NGOs and governments at district level can be found in most African countries. I will cite three from Zimbabwe. NGOs can train government extension workers in methods of community organizing and resource mobilization, as the Savings Development Movement has done with the Ministry of Agriculture. Where government staff are thin on the ground NGOs can organize their clientele to receive government services in a group setting, as the Adult Literacy Organization of Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Women's Bureau have done with the same Ministry. NGOs can even integrate their support systems with government structures as Silveira House has done in multidisciplinary agricultural development teams.

Chambers has noted that NGO staff who selectively work with local authorities may have exceptional opportunities to influence official priorities, procedures and activities. They can also be helpful allies for

government field staff who wish to initiate progressive change (Chambers 1987, 11-12). For example, NGOs pioneered the use of paraprofessional auxiliary workers in Africa, an approach now adopted by several African governments for primary health care, population planning, and agricultural services at grassroots level. The most thoughtful NGO managers do not build up expensive field staffs of their own but seek to "piggy-back" NGO programs onto existing government extension structures. In a particularly interesting experiment along these lines, the Uganda Catholic Secretariat has succeeded in partially revitalizing an otherwise dormant government agricultural extension service to assist in the rehabilitation of war-damaged farming areas.

NGOs in Africa have not yet been able to gain access to significant portions of government development budgets. Public grants-in-aid to NGOs are usually meagre and are restricted to National Councils of Social Services and the few selected agencies that work closely with them. Some indigenous NGOs in Africa have attempted to win core institutional funding from their home governments, but with little success. In Zimbabwe, for example, the Agricultural Finance Corporation welcomed assistance in administering seasonal loans to farmer groups from Silveira House, a church-based training center. But Silveira House was never able to convince government to pay a fee for such services. Indeed, far from awarding service delivery sub-contracts that would underwrite NGO operations, governments have usually sought ways to get NGOs to absorb part of the recurrent costs of reaching the rural areas.

Policy Advocacy

Ideally, NGOs should have useful ideas to offer to rural development planners. By demonstrating alternative methods of getting things done at the village level, they can offer useful policy suggestions on questions of local resource mobilization, recurrent cost recovery, and program sustainability. By documenting local experiences, NGOs can enhance the understanding of governments and donors on the local effects of economic adjustment policies on various strata of the rural population. In an era when the orthodoxy in development policy gives emphasis to economic growth, NGOs may even help to ensure that issues of social justice do not slip, unnoticed, off the rural development agenda.

As NGOs endeavor to increase their scale of operations, they inevitably led to the policy arena. Through analysis of success and failure in projects NGOs may identify certain overarching conditions -- such as price or institutional structures -- that are best addressed through policy reform. And once membership of NGOs expand beyond the community group level into federated forms of organization, they also begin to accumulate political clout. NGOs may even adopt an explicitly political agenda in which advocacy and development education are seen as part of the mission of the voluntary sector. All of these factors require that NGO leaders become increasingly sophisticated at managing a dialogue with the State on rural development policy.

In practice, NGO policy influence in Africa to date has been extremely modest. Greater impact has not been achieved for three reasons, each of which points to the need for institutional strengthening within the voluntary sector.

First, NGOs in Africa have been somewhat self-absorbed in the policies that directly affect the operations of the voluntary sector. NGO advocacy tends to begin with parochial, day-to-day concerns such as government registration requirements, NGO duty-free privileges, tax exemption for charitable contributions, or access to "blocked" funds. Perhaps such a starting point is appropriate. As many speakers noted at a major international conference held in Nairobi in October 1986, both the private and the voluntary sectors look first to government to provide a more conducive "enabling environment" for their activities. In this sense, NGOs which call for the liberalization of particular regulations are contributing to a broader debate on development strategy. To date, African Governments have not generally been responsive to calls for the wholesale reform of administrative rules, preferring instead to retain the discretion to make decisions on individual NGO applications on a case-by-case basis.

Nor have NGOs in Africa yet found a way to convincingly articulate their views on broader development policy issues. Only in countries where there is a strong commercial farmers lobby -- such as Zimbabwe and Zambia -- are there precedents for policy formulation for the rural sector on the basis

of recommendations submitted by non-government agencies. In these places, the farmer unions' position papers on agricultural pricing and land reform have decisively shaped government policy choice. It is therefore noteworthy that small farmer NGOs, like the National Farmers Association of Zimbabwe (NFAZ), are now seeking to do the same. Because the research departments of government ministries do not produce much careful and useable policy advice, there is opportunity here for a large NGO role. It would be highly desirable for organizations which speak for the rural poor to be able to propose draft legislation and issue public statements on policy issues that affect them.

This brings us, secondly, to the question of institutional capacity. Public policy analysis and advocacy are demanding tasks that are well beyond the current staff capacity of most indigenous NGOs in Africa. To address this weakness, the National Councils of Churches and National Co-operative Federations have begun to establish research and documentation departments and have embarked on staff development programs to upgrade professional standards. As an alternative means of attracting the necessary expertise, these NGOs are also initiating innovative collaborative relationships with researchers in national universities. And, as NGOs involved in primary health care in Kenya have found, the prospects for policy influence are increased when there is a critical mass of experience that can be brought to bear in a particular sectoral area.

Direct policy influence by indigenous NGOs on African governments is ultimately related to the strength of national "umbrella" institutions. Where these exist they are new and fragile and often lack a convincing mandate from the NGO community they purport to serve. In 1984, Voluntary Agencies Development Assistance (VADA) was formed to provide management training services to NGOs in Kenya but was never able to win sufficient legitimacy to speak with one voice for all NGOs. Voluntary Organizations in Community Enterprise (VOICE) in Zimbabwe also lacks stature, here because member NGOs complain that its leadership is not aggressive enough in articulating common NGO concerns to government. Even church-based umbrella bodies, like the Catholic Secretariats and National Councils of Churches, are not always able

to carry all their members along when they wish to take a strong stance in the political debates of the day. The creation of national umbrella bodies that can speak with a relatively unified voice for the voluntary sector is an important item of unfinished business in Africa.

Finally, NGO's find that relations with donors condition their effectiveness as policy advocates. Through dialogue with donors, NGOs have had more impact in changing foreign assistance policies than in altering the behaviour of home governments. Partnership arrangements between indigenous and international NGOs are proving to be valuable channels for grassroots concerns to be articulated up the funding chain to the points of aid decision-making in the industrialized world. And indigenous NGOs are increasingly using the same channels to demand a greater share of decision-making power, for example, by engineering a shift from short-term, project-based funding to core institutional support for long-term programs. To the extent that donor funds underpin official rural development effort in Africa, NGOs also have a small measure of indirect leverage on African policy makers through donor channels.

But, paradoxically, the strength of NGOs as seen by African governments is also their greatest weakness. Governments tend to value the NGOs largely because of the additional flows of development capital they attract. Yet the dependence of national NGOs on foreign funding undercuts their ability to perform as effective policy actors. Governments can easily dismiss them as dancing to the tune of a foreign piper with no legitimate right of entry to the domestic policy arena. If national NGOs in Africa are to become truly autonomous, they will have to take a leaf from the book of community-level NGOs and devote far greater effort to building a domestic resource base. This is important, not only in terms of economic efficiency and institutional sustainability, but in terms of ensuring the accountability of indigenous NGOs to a domestic political constituency.

Because of the institutional weakness of the voluntary sector, the current state of play in the government-NGO policy dialogue is decidedly one-sided. In reality, the first task of NGOs is to get African governments to take them seriously as policy actors. For the moment, African NGO leaders

have tended to chose a defferential and accomodating approach. Experience has shown that confrontation has caused governments to intensify administrative control. But because they are often the only voice available to the rural poor, the challenge for NGO leaders is to speak plainly, resist cooptation and build NGO institutions.

COMPARISONS AND CONCLUSIONS

In order to draw conclusions about the current evolution of government-NGO relations in Africa, it is helpful to compare Africa with the contemporary situations in Latin America and South Asia.

In Latin America, where military dictatorships have generally been the order of the day, the State has repressed popular movements and inhibited progressive social change (Landim, 1987; Frantz 1987). NGOs, by contrast, have cultivated direct ties with opposition political groupings and have come out explicitly in favour of the restoration of civil society. NGOs have been extremely wary of close association with government for fear that they would be used to legitimize an unjust social order. Recently, in the parts of Latin America where a process of redemocratization is underway new debates have opened upon the rightful role of NGOs vis a vis governments. Yet, even though the voluntary sector has begun to provide leaders for new democratic regimes, the basic relationship between NGOs and governments remains one of deep estrangement.

South Asia has generally had a far happier history of government-NGO relations. Not only have governance systems been relatively democratic, but incumbent regimes have usually given high priority to developing programs of direct poverty alleviation. Governments have tried to target rural development at disadvantaged groups and have even been willing to place resources in the hands of the poor. This has proved to be a receptive environment for the growth of NGOs and for the emergence of open collaboration and institutional linkage across sectors (Tandon, 1987; Fernandez, 1987). In both India and Sri Lanka, for example, central and local governments have selectively transferred responsibility for the management of development

programs to proven NGOs. And the NGO sector won a major policy victory when in 1986 (ch), the Government of India for the first time wrote the allocation of government funding for NGO programs into its Seventh National Development Plan.

The African experience with government-NGO relations lies somewhere between the Latin American and South Asian extremes. African governments are neither as democratically responsive as their South Asian counterparts, nor as effective at authoritarian control as Latin American military governments. And NGOs in Africa still tend to be preoccupied with relief or welfare programs. Unlike the more successful NGOs in South Asia, they have yet to devise economic development strategies that will work for the poorest of the poor; and unlike the sophisticated rights advocacy organizations in Latin America, they have yet to find an authentic voice and political program. And because African institutions are themselves embryonic, the relations between institutions are necessarily fluid and incipient. In Africa, both the centralized States and the developmental NGOs are relatively new structures and the limits of their popular support and managerial capacity have yet to be fully tested. We can expect relations to swing back and forth as each side probes to discover a workable set of interinstitutional arrangements that suits African conditions.

Although governments and NGOs may be uncomfortable bedfellows in Africa, they are destined to cohabit. To date they have usually been able to negotiate a cordial and non-confrontational relationship. Wisely, NGOs have not endeavoured to displace or supplant the development efforts of governments. For their part, governments have acknowledged the supplementary contribution of NGOs to development, provided this is not accompanied by attempts to seize public initiative or reap political credit. I have argued in this paper that government-NGO relations are likely to be most constructive where a confident government with populist policies meets an NGO that wishes to pursue mainstream development programs in the nation's heartland. Relations are likely to be most conflictual where a weak and defensive government with a limited power base meets an NGO that seeks to promote community mobilization in a contested border area. Otherwise, relations are likely to blow erratically hot and cold depending on the government's perception of the

national security situation of the day.

Certain trends in government-NGO relations in Africa are nonetheless perceptible. A more "enabling" environment is by no means guaranteed. As the voluntary sector grows and continues to shoulder ever greater responsibility for servicing rural areas, so African governments will increasingly seek to tighten control. Attempts to officially regulate NGOs are likely to intensify rather than weaken in the future. Governments are likely to use a mix of strategies, at the same time seeking to dissolve the assertive and coopt the meek. Special effort will be made to improve monitoring procedures and strengthen official coordination bodies. For their part, NGOs will find increasing difficulty in maintaining a low profile and, in their own interest, will seek legal registration, but in flexible forms such as not-for-profit companies. In order to avoid merely responding passively to official directives, NGOs will also have to initiate more active overtures to governments for selective collaboration and policy dialogue. Only with positive action will NGOs be able to help mould a supportive rather than a regulated, environment.

One prediction is clear. The evolving relationship between governments and non-governmental organizations in Africa will be influenced more by political than economic considerations. Donors -- rather than governments -- will be most likely to scrutinize the claim that NGOs are effective at rural development. In other words, any "shaking out" of NGOs on cost-benefit grounds is likely to be instituted by the funders rather than the hosts. Governments are likely instead to focus keenly on security affairs, with situations of civil disaffection being least conducive to a liberal attitude of African governments towards NGOs. Governments value the material contribution made by NGOs to inflows of foreign assistance and improvements in rural standards of living. But these contributions are not indispensable. African leaders stand ready to sacrifice the economic development programs of individual NGOs if issues of national sovereignty and stability are at stake.

This should not be taken to mean that NGOs have little room to organize autonomously for development. The reach of the African State

routinely exceeds its grasp; few governments have been able to construct organizational machinery at the village level; especially in the countryside there are large expanses of unexplored space for NGOs to occupy. To the extent they give ordinary people an opportunity to participate in decisions and represent local interests, NGOs have an important role to play in political development. They have the potential to assemble scattered social groups into integrated social movements. Ideally, they can offer access not only economic opportunities, but to a broader understanding of a citizen's rights and duties under the law. By building independent organizations at the community, regional and national levels, NGOs in Africa have already helped to populate and pluralize the institutional landscape. As such, their impact should be evaluated, not purely in terms of economic growth and social welfare, but also with regard to the strengthening of civil society.

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