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Civil Society? NGOism at Work

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Liberales Institut

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Civil Society? NGOism at Work

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Introduction

Before I begin, let me briefly clear up any misunderstanding that might arise from my use of the concepts 'civil society' and 'non-governmental organisation' (NGO). I use the expression 'civil society' to refer to society at large, including the interest groups that are found within it and which fall outside the ambit of government. This is exactly antithetical to the concept of 'civil service', which, paradoxically, refers to the professional branches of state administration, excluding military and judicial branches and elected politicians.

The term 'non-governmental organization' (NGO) refers to organizations and interest groups which operate outside the sphere of government and which do not belong to and are not officially associated with government. Yet the negative reference to government paradoxically hints at the relevance of many NGOs to governmental affairs and, indeed, their influence or would-be influence upon these affairs.

My purpose in this paper is to illustrate and comment upon the extent to which NGOs exert influence over government policy both at a national and a global level. I am particularly concerned with the manner in which NGOs in developing countries seek to influence their governments in favour of statist policies and statist solutions to local problems.

While the NGO sector in most countries is very diverse (including charities as well as lobby groups, activist organizations and think-tanks) and spans a wide spectrum of ideological and non-ideological sentiments and views, I think it is possible, at least in the case of lobby groups, think tanks and other policy-oriented NGOs, to characterize most of them as grounded within one of two opposing paradigms: on the one hand a statist or social-democratic model of the good society and on the other a classical liberal approach to the relationship between state and citizen. Those within the first group advocate policies that require or imply increased government expenditure, increased state intervention in the economy and greater state control of social services and economic activity. Those in the second group advocate a minimal role for government in the economic arena and seek instead to mobilise the energies of private citizens, private donors and private enterprises. The latter group of NGOs are more likely to draw upon the energies of private donors and volunteers and are less likely to seek state intervention in support of the causes they espouse. I am primarily concerned here with a critique of the activities of NGOs in the statist camp.

Statist NGOs characteristically construe government as a paternalistic entity, whose primary function is the redistribution of resources, the redress of inequalities and the provision of welfare for all the people, especially or even primarily the poorest citizens. This all-embracing function is usually taken to include the provision of comprehensive health services, education, housing, transport and old age pensions, the delivery of jobs, the protection of labour from foreign competition and domestic exploitation and the protection of consumers from a wide range of hazards.

The important fact to bear in mind is that this type of NGO tends to conceive of society as bifurcated: villains on one side, victims on the other. Thus, for example, the owners of capital and the providers of labour are believed to fall into two easily identifiable and clearly opposing groups, antagonists on opposite sides of a fundamental divide. In an international context, the rich (especially multinational companies with interests in developing economies) become the villains, accumulating wealth at the expense of the poor of the world, who are cast primarily in the role of victim. At a global level, this bifurcated vision is applied to what is called 'the centre and the periphery', or the 'North/South Divide'. Developed countries, and, more specifically, multinational enterprises which originate from within them, are cast as villains who, thanks to imperialism and colonialism, owe their economic advantage and their power to the historic exploitation of underdeveloped countries which still suffer, it is alleged, the ravages of these evils. This brings me to a discussion of the *modus operandi* of statist NGOs.

The *modus operandi* of statist NGOs

These NGOs tend to play up social divisions, exaggerating differences and inequalities, especially socio-economic inequalities, and interpreting them in terms of conflicting interests rooted in fundamental social antagonisms. The eradication of these differences, so the argument goes, requires extraordinary measures and the application of the coercive powers of government. It is therefore understandable that these NGOs generally seek to influence and curry favour with the government of the day. In this they can be remarkably successful. In Africa, at least, one can point to many examples where government policies mirror the specific aspirations and agendas of this group of NGOs.

How do NGOs achieve this success? The answer lies firstly in understanding the nature of politicians and their *modus operandi* and secondly in examining how these NGOs 'constructively engage' political decision makers. Politicians are essentially opportunistic individuals, very much given to indulging in popu-

list rhetoric in many cases. Because they are consumed with winning votes they tend to be oriented towards the short term. They also tend to think in numerical terms when considering policy. They calculate the numbers of people who will be adversely affected by specific policies as against the number who will benefit (in the short term). The policies they choose are those that are going to alienate the least number of people, real voters. Such is the nature of the animal. The exceptions prove the rule.

The NGOs which lobby for increased state intervention in their particular areas of concern seem to be alert to the politicians' need to please their voters and to their consequent susceptibility to emotive and populist language. They are adept at the mobilisation of sentiment, often at the expense of rational consideration and analysis. For example, in the context of worldwide controversy surrounding the use of biotechnology in agriculture, the international lobby against genetically modified organisms (GMOs) makes much use of allegations that scientists working in the field of biotechnology are 'playing God'. Sometimes this is explicitly stated; at other times there is more subtle suggestion involved. The fact that over many millions of years all of nature has been involved in an ongoing process of genetic modification and species adaptation is not taken cognisance of. Man himself is a genetically modified being. This argument is not entertained at all by those NGOs that oppose the spread of GMOs to developing countries.

However, the central argument mobilised by opponents of GMOs is the seemingly sensible but nevertheless emotive 'precautionary principle.' As this argument is used very extensively it warrants more elaborate treatment.

In South Africa, as in many other developing countries, biotechnology activists have recently attempted to persuade parliamentarians to adopt a super cautious approach towards the utilisation of biotechnology in agricultural development. They suggested in the run-up to parliamentary hearings on the Genetically Modified Organisms (GMO) Bill that the 'precautionary principle' should be applied to the production of all GMOs.

At first sight the precautionary principle sounds reasonable and sensible. Have we not all since childhood been warned to 'look before we leap' or to follow the precept: 'if in doubt, don't do it'? Those who have followed this advice will no doubt at times have avoided danger, loss and even injury. On the other hand, if they followed the precautionary advice to avoid all risk they would have missed opportunities for adventure, career advancement and success. They may even have saved their lives: for example, failing to leap out of the way of an oncoming vehicle before being sure of your landing could prove fatal.

As a result of the lobbying of environmental NGOs, the Cartagena Protocol, which addresses a broad spectrum of issues related to the protection of biological diversity, has now been incorporated into the South African GMO Act. The Protocol's stated intention is "the conservation of habitats in developing nations". This intention seems admirable and the Protocol's specific objective is crafted to sound unobjectionable. However, its reference to 'the precautionary approach' contained in Principle 15 of the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development should give us pause.

The objective of the Protocol is "to contribute to ensuring an adequate level of protection in the field of the safe transfer, handling and use of living modified organisms resulting from modern biotechnology that may have adverse effects on the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, taking also into account risks to human health, and specifically focusing on trans-boundary movements." But opponents of GMO's, for whom the Protocol has become a useful tool, are inclined to exaggerate the risks and demand from governments that they regulate biotechnology to the point of extinction, using its 'precautionary approach' to try and block even the most sensible government approaches to the issue.

The precautionary principle is not as benign and innocuous as it may sound. It requires action to be taken to avoid a risk even when there is incomplete scientific evidence as to its magnitude and potential impact. The approach demands that a technology should not be used unless and until it has been shown to be absolutely safe, reversing the usual burden of proof. New technologies are assumed to be harmful until they have been proved safe to an impossible standard demanded by their critics.

Doctor Elizabeth M. Whelan, the president of the American Council on Science and Health, recorded objections to the precautionary principle. She said that it always assumes worst-case scenarios, distracts consumers and policy makers alike from known and proven threats to human health and assumes no adverse consequences for health from the proposed regulations and restrictions. She said that: "the precautionary principle overlooks the possibility that real public health risks can be associated with expending resources on eliminating miniscule hypothetical risks."¹ When the Zambian government turned away GMO maize intended for its starving people because of the theoretical health risk it attached to its consumption, it created a real risk that turned into tragedy. Denied the food, people died of starvation.

1 Elizabeth M Whelan, 'Can Too Much Safety be Hazardous? A Critical Look at the "Precautionary Principle"', American Council on Science and Health, May 2000.

The entire focus of the precautionary principle is on the possibility that new products may pose theoretical risks. Applied to agriculture and food biotechnology it ignores the very real existing risks of hunger, starvation and malnutrition that can be reduced or eliminated by the new products. Applied decades ago to innovations like polio vaccines and antibiotics the precautionary principle may have prevented occasional serious side effects at the expense of millions of lives lost to infectious diseases. Applied today to penicillin and aspirin, to which some people are allergic, it would deny their use to others who are not allergic to these valuable medications.

Regulations based on the precautionary principle severely compromise the potential for new technology. By acceding to the protocol South Africa has risked deterring large multinational biotechnology companies from carrying out research in the country or making their products available to its citizens.

Major potential investments that could provide jobs and reduce poverty in South Africa are placed at risk. Without such investments highly skilled South African scientists may choose to leave the country in order to pursue their occupations elsewhere. The amendments to the legislation are likely to increase the amount of paper work and costs of field-testing the plant varieties created with biotechnology. As the writers Miller and Conko noted: The Biosafety Protocol has become the UN's Trojan horse, surreptitiously delivering ruinous biotechnology-averse regulatory policies to the developing world.²

Legislators should perhaps test the precautionary principle against itself. The principle requires that we take action to avoid a risk even when there is incomplete scientific evidence as to its magnitude and potential impact. Consider the risk of applying the precautionary principle. How do we know what harm it will do in blocking agricultural development in developing countries? Can we be absolutely sure that the non-utilisation of biotechnology will not cause future poverty, hunger and malnutrition in the developing world? We cannot be sure and the opponents of the use of biotechnology can also not be sure.

Many countries already have government systems with adequate controls over biotechnology research and development. The addition of more red tape will merely add unnecessary costs and reduce efficiency. In a country that desperately needs high growth, jobs, and higher living standards for its people, innovation with such spectacularly positive potential should not be discouraged. But it has been.

2 Henry I Miller & Gregory Conko, 'The UN Biotechnology and the Poorest of the Poor', Regulation No 2, 2005, *Hoover Digest: Research and Opinion on Public Policy*, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/digest/2993011.html>

This leads me to another point that is often totally ignored by purveyors of statist policies. This is the objective reality that all policies and regulations have cost implications. For statist NGOs the unintended economic consequences of the policies they promote often seem to be of no significance. Economics teaches that human beings make choices by weighing the costs against the benefits of a given action or transaction. Linked to this principle is the fact of opportunity cost. What opportunity is foregone when we choose a certain course of action? What might better serve the needs of the people for the same amount of resources? What is the cost of our choice in comparison with the benefit? When costs outweigh benefits, what is the rational thing to do? It is surely to forego the contemplated course of action. But alas, all this is irrelevant to the statist NGOs. In this regard, they make complementary bedfellows with politicians generally.

Classical liberal NGOs

It would appear to be universally true that when interventionist policies are put in place, one sees the simultaneous emergence of a bureaucracy that is charged with the implementation and enforcement of such policies. The consequence of this is that when the policies do not seem to achieve the desired results, the bureaucrats, out of self-interest, motivate the enactment of more regulations on the pretext of closing loopholes and eliminating weaknesses in the given policies.

NGOs of liberal persuasion are more likely than their statist counterparts to be alert to this tendency of the interventionist state to continuously expand the sphere of its activities. They operate on the basis of 'critical engagement' vis-à-vis government. They do not conceive of government primarily as an instrument of reform and redistribution which acts (or should act) in the best interests of the people as a whole. From this perspective all proposed legislation is rigorously analysed and generally subjected to the litmus test of an analysis of costs versus benefits. These NGOs have a more cynical view of government than their statist counterparts and insist that, in order to protect citizens against abuses of power, the lines of demarcation between the judiciary, the legislature and the executive should not be blurred. When proposed policies are perceived to undermine this separation of powers, these NGOs are most vociferous in their criticism. Again, this is not surprising because the principle of separation of powers is sacrosanct to classical liberalism, with its commitment to the rule of law. In the same breath let it be stated that this does not mean that NGOs within this sector are always consistent with and true to such principles.

There is another point that has to be given serious consideration in any discussion of the policy positions adopted by statist NGOs. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the dismantling of communism in much of Eastern Europe, many in the West who had been convinced adherents of a socialist worldview and had nurtured hopes for the expansion of socialism in their own countries, felt deeply disappointed and politically emasculated. It will be recalled that, in an attempt to come to terms with the situation, many averred, ostrich fashion, that true socialism had not been implemented in the countries where it had imploded (Trotskyites had long referred to Russian communism as 'state capitalism'), and the short-lived clarion call was for the real thing to be properly implemented. (Some on the Left still make this argument today.) The important point here is that, eventually despairing of the implementation of an explicitly socialist agenda in the West, the more creative among these intellectuals and activists took up the banner of new and more popular anti-capitalist causes. A case in point is the opposition to the liberalisation of international trade. Few considered the possibility that Marx and Lenin may have been wrong in their diagnosis of the ills of capitalist society and in their conviction that capitalism was unable to deliver a better life for all.

So where are these people now? They are right there in the trenches of state welfarism, marching under the banner of 'the developmental state', in the green movement, and in many NGOs that denounce globalisation, taking up cudgels on behalf of the downtrodden and oppressed, professing their commitment to the 'poorest of the poor'. But beneath this façade of concern for the poor lies a culture of blame, which casts rich people and rich nations as villains, answerable for all the misery that afflicts the less fortunate. It is therefore not surprising that the policies they advocate tend to be punitive. They rely on the coercive powers of government for the implementation of their agenda.

Globalisation is an issue which the statisticians have been exploiting quite dramatically, by projecting it negatively as a conspiracy involving rich nations and multinational corporations against producers and consumers in poor nations.

Activists opposed to globalisation call for the stringent regulation of international trade and advocate redistribution of wealth from rich individuals, rich communities and rich nations to poor people, poor communities and poor nations. However, in general, the assets that they wish to see redistributed do not belong to them, but to other people, for example, the taxpayers of their home countries.

Activists against globalisation stick fast to their concept of an unbridgeable gulf between rich and poor and they tend to be dismissive of the stories of dynamic

individuals who through their own strivings have been able to uplift themselves from adverse socio-economic circumstances. Such individuals, they argue, are exceptional and their achievements have no bearing on the fundamental helplessness of the majority of poor people, especially those in developing nations. Conversely, they choose not to acknowledge that the rich can all too easily become poor, through misfortune or through mismanagement of their assets.

Curiously, Africa, in particular, is singled out by opponents of globalisation as the chief victim of its negative consequences. Together with a wide spectrum of NGOs, anti-globalisation activists seek to remedy Africa's dire economic plight through the application of aid. They depict the continent as hopelessly mired in poverty and misery, with no prospect whatsoever of pulling itself out of the situation through the efforts of its own people and no hope of competing successfully in global markets. They continue to call for more aid money, despite the poor record of aid to Africa historically.

Increasingly those Africans who are opposed to further aid draw attention to the fact that aid has merely propped up dictatorial and corrupt governments to the detriment of the governed. The argument against aid is succinctly and effectively articulated in the following excerpt from an essay that was published in 2005 by the CATO Institute:

Every decade or so, a throng of Western donors, African governments, and international organizations gathers to announce grand initiatives to pull the world's poorest continent out of its economic miasma. Congratulatory pats on the back are exchanged. Delegates return home and then nothing much is heard after that. Back in 1985, the United Nations held a Special Session on Africa to boost aid to Africa. In March 1996, the United Nations launched a \$25 billion Special Initiative for Africa. They all fizzled. Why should Africans place any faith in the current initiatives to reverse Africa's economic atrophy?

Helping Africa is a noble cause, but the campaign has become a theatre of the absurd—the blind leading the clueless. The record of Western aid to Africa is one of abysmal failure. More than \$500 billion in foreign aid – the equivalent of four Marshall Aid Plans – was pumped into Africa between 1960 and 1997. Instead of increasing development, aid has created dependence. The budgets of Ghana and Uganda, for example, are more than 50 percent aid dependent.

Said President Aboulaye Wade of Senegal: "I've never seen a country develop itself through aid or credit. Countries that have developed – in Europe, America, Japan, Asian countries like Taiwan, Korea and Singapore – have all belie-

ved in free markets. There is no mystery there. Africa took the wrong road after independence."³

*The more aid poured into Africa, the lower its standard of living. Per capita GDP of Africans living south of the Sahara declined at an average annual rate of 0.59 percent between 1975 and 2000. Over that period, per capita GDP adjusted for purchasing power parity declined from \$ 1,770 in constant 1995 international dollars to \$ 1,479. The evidence that foreign aid underwrites misguided policies and feeds corrupt and bloated state bureaucracies is overwhelming.*⁴

In his seminal work, *Equality, the Third World, and Economic Delusion*, the late Peter Bauer remarks perceptively that a bizarre and masochistic guilt complex underpins western attitudes to the developing world. "The exponents of guilt", he writes, "further patronize the Third World by suggesting that its economic fortunes past, present and prospective, are determined by the West, that past exploitation by the West explains Third World backwardness. According to this set of ideas, whatever happens to the Third World is largely our doing. Such ideas make us feel superior even while we beat our breasts."⁵

Contrary to the opinions of left wing activists, globalisation is not a capitalist plot hatched in Washington, Tokyo, or Brussels. It is simply a manifestation of entrepreneurial ingenuity, the spirit of enterprise that knows no political or geographic boundaries. It is the economic logic of entrepreneurship that prompts people to seek markets abroad so as to increase their revenue and maximise their profits. This is not to say that globalisation is acceptable on any terms or that its operations necessarily benefit poor countries.

Globalisation refers primarily to an increase in trans-national trading and human interaction at a speed and on a scale unprecedented in the history of human development. Thanks to information technology and other technological advances, the speed and scale understandably invite a great deal of debate regarding the consequences of the process and particularly its impact on developing markets.

Fair trade is at the very centre of global debate and should be discussed concomitantly with any analysis of globalisation. Any meaningful attempt at reviving

3 Norimitsu Onishi, 'Senegalese loner works to build Africa, his way', *New York Times*, April 10, 2002.

4 Thompson Ayodele, Franklin Cudjoe, Temba A. Nolutshungu and Charles K. Sunwabe, 'African perspectives on aid: foreign assistance will not pull Africa out of poverty', *Cato Institute economic development bulletin 2* (2005), 1.

5 P.T. Bauer, *Equality, the Third World, and Economic Delusion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981).

the collapsed Doha Round of international trade negotiations must pivot on the fundamental issue of fair trade across countries. In particular, the circumstances and realities faced by producers in developing countries relative to their counterparts in developed countries must be examined.

Policies in the agricultural arena should be the same as policies applied in other sectors of the global economy. At present, African farmers face many barriers to the successful export of their products to the developed world. For instance, a Mozambican producer of agricultural products may have no trouble selling her products in South Africa, but should she try to enter the European market she would come face to face with the 'Berlin Wall' of high subsidies and other forms of protection erected for the benefit of domestic producers.

She might well be at a loss to understand why governments of developed countries would wish to subsidise her competitors in their own countries, rather than allow fair competition between them. Governments of developed countries should consider the consequences for farmers in developing countries when they introduce such measures as subsidies on agricultural products or tariffs on imports.

Agricultural price subsidies impose unnecessary burdens on developed country taxpayers and reduce competition from foreign competitors. Tariffs on imports, on the other hand, increase prices to domestic consumers and protect uneconomic local producers. In both cases a bias is introduced against developing country farmers. The effects of this bias cannot and should not be corrected or reduced by foreign aid because the efficient developing country farmer is in any case not likely to be a foreign aid recipient.

What role should governments then play in order to enhance trans-national trading? Governments must decide what policies or legislation to introduce, or perhaps more aptly, what policies should be abandoned or legislation repealed in order to ensure that the global competitiveness of businesses is not compromised.

An actual instance where globalisation resulted in good value for money for consumers provides an insight into its possibilities. It was reported in *The Economist* that Elattuvalapil Steedharan, the managing director of the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, was confronted with the daunting task of establishing an efficient metro service in Delhi in the shortest possible time, a task he accomplished with flying colours. How did he do it? He engaged a consortium from Japan as consultants, obtained the rolling stock from Korea, the signalling and collection systems from France and a loan for two-thirds of the finance from the Japanese government. The result is a sophisticated and efficient metro that boasts a three-stage

escalator, ticket barriers that use tokens, and a smart card payment system that compares with the best in the world. The result? Happy commuters.⁶

Trans-national trading enables entrepreneurs to deliver good value to consumers. Such entrepreneurially driven endeavours translate into improvements in the socio-economic conditions of people across the globe. They are driven by the profit motive, without any altruistic motivations whatsoever, and the result is the phenomenon that Adam Smith described as 'the invisible hand'.

'The developmental state'

Another statist cause which has been gaining impetus in recent times, especially against the background of the collapse of communism and socialism, is the concept of 'the developmental state'. There are many NGOs which ardently espouse this idea and put it forward as an alternative to what they call 'free market fundamentalism', by which they mean any approach to development which encourages market led growth, favours trade liberalisation and allocates a leading role to the private sector. The advocates of the developmental state propose that the state should be the principal agency directing national development. The state should marshal the economic activities of individuals and husband the resources to be found within countries. Through carefully planned interventions, for example in the use of tariffs and subsidies, tax incentives, education policy and state investment in infrastructure and key industries (such as transport, banking, telecommunications and energy), the state should be the chief agent and director of economic growth. This is essentially a planned economy by another name. The arrogance of this prescriptive top-down approach is what Hayek referred to as the fatal conceit. The fallacious assumption is that a few individuals, specifically those employed by or consulting to government, are endowed with the knowledge and expertise to achieve 'national' objectives such as the alleviation and elimination of poverty and the facilitation of development. Whatever the consequences, direct or unintended, the means require that the plans of private individuals be modified by, or at worst be subordinated to, the state's collective will.

Stripped of its altruistic pretences, 'developmentalism' is an ideology that seeks to supplant the uncoerced, voluntary and peaceful efforts of individuals that are coordinated by free markets with a prescriptive collectivist approach that puts the state at the centre.

6 *The Economist*, 18 February 2007.

In a recent paper entitled 'The ideology of development', Professor William Easterly states the following:

Unfortunately, Development ideology has a dismal record of helping any country actually develop. The regions where the ideology has been most influential, Latin America and Africa, have done the worst. Luckless Latins and Africans are left chasing yesterday's formulas for success. While those who ignored the Developmentalists found homegrown paths to success.⁷

Easterly is mistrustful of experts and critical of all centrally conceived, top-down approaches to development, whether they ostensibly favour free markets or advocate state intervention. He chronicles the failed policies of international agencies such as the IMF and the World Bank which for decades now have sought to impose a changing series of carefully planned and scientifically justified developmental strategies upon the world's poorest nations, without visible success. On the contrary, Easterly contends,

The nations that have been the most successful in the past 40 years did so in such a variety of different ways that it would be hard to argue that they discovered the 'correct answer' from development ideology. In fact, they often conspicuously violated whatever it was the experts said at the time. The East Asian tigers, for instance, chose outward orientation on their own in the 1960s, when the experts' conventional wisdom was industrialization for the home market. The rapid growth of China over the past quarter century came when it was hardly a poster child for either the 1980s Washington Consensus or the 1990s institutionalism of democracy and cracking down on corruption.⁸

In sum, he suggests, development planned by experts and imposed from above, whether in the name of free markets or of the 'developmental state', is not the way to go, whether at the national or the international level. Countries, like individuals, should be free to make their own mistakes and learn from the consequences.

7 William Easterly, 'The ideology of development', *Foreign Policy*, July/August 2007.

8 *Ibid.*

What is to be done?

It is important to conclude by juxtaposing the neo-socialist views of statist NGOs with those of organisations inspired by classical liberalism. Statists see people in need as unable to help themselves. They must therefore depend on government for their advancement and their well-being. Classical liberals, by contrast, believe in taking personal responsibility for one's own destiny. They believe that one's station in life is not determined by the accident of birth but through one's strivings; that humans are capable of attaining the standards they aspire to; that government does not have a monopoly on wisdom and knowledge; that people should accept the consequences of the choices they make; that one person is not entitled to the fruits of another's labour, and that people are capable of compassion towards their fellowmen and those who have personal knowledge of the poor and needy know best how to assist them in a way that does not undermine their pride.

What, then, ought to be the role of governments? Governments must desist from espousing policies that encumber private enterprise: entrepreneurs, not governments, are the creators of sustainable wealth and jobs. Governments must not sacrifice broader socio-economic interests on the altar of politically correct policies which pander to vested interests; such actions ultimately have a negative impact on the economic performance of the country.

It takes statesmanship to reverse policies that have demonstrably negative socio-economic consequences. Politicians are generally oriented towards the short-term, pursue policies that they believe will maintain their support base, and tend to avoid actions they believe may alienate their voters. A statesman acts in the longer term for the good of all. Alexander Pope, almost three centuries ago, described the qualities required when he wrote: "Statesman, yet friend to truth, of soul sincere, in action faithful and in honour clear; who broke no promise, served no private end, who gained no title and who lost no friend".

The Mozambican producer with his hoe in his hand knocks on the door of his government and pleads for his economic freedom. He also knocks on the doors of the leaders of the developed world pleading for the right to compete on equal terms with his competitors in developed countries. He knows that the consumers in those countries want his farm products. He knows this, because he is an entrepreneur. All he needs is for the negotiating governments to act in a statesman-like manner.

So what is the way forward for classical liberal NGOs? They face a daunting task if they are to enter the lists against the many vocal organisations that fa-

your statist interventions in the name of poor people and poor nations. They must redefine the terms of the debate and clarify and demystify concepts such as globalisation and 'the developmental state'.

The place to begin is with a clear definition of the role of government. Classical liberal activists subscribe to the principle of government's core functions: the protection of the citizens from internal and external aggression; the protection of private property and the maintenance of the rule of law through a strong and independent judiciary and laws impartially applied. This should always be the underlying theme of all engagements and needs to be articulated as frequently as possible.

These NGOs should insist on subjecting all policies to an impact assessment or cost/benefit analysis. This is known as a regulatory impact assessment (RIA) in some cases. This in itself would serve to depoliticise the debate and focus on its bare essentials. With every policy engagement these questions should loom large: at what cost is the policy being implemented? Who stands to gain? Vested interests should be unmasked.

Lastly, NGOs of classical liberal persuasion should see government for what it is: a necessary evil. This healthy scepticism of government is the beginning of the understanding that government expansion is at the expense of individual liberty. The agenda of liberal NGOs should be to enhance the freedom of people everywhere.

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Temba A. Nolutshungu joined the training division of the South African Free Market Foundation in 1989 and was appointed Director in 1990. He played a prominent role in the Black Consciousness Movement. He is also a Director of the V&A Waterfront.