

**The 4th Eastern African
Fund Raising Workshop**
Kampala

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Background paper
Session: evening
with PS.*

Government/NGO Relationships and Their Role in Local Resource Mobilization (A discussion paper)

It is a pleasure and a honour to be here with you - many of whom I have also met at the MS Training Centre for Development Cooperation in Arusha. Representing a Danish NGO I feel being among friends. I do hope, that this also will be the case in half an hour's time. Not all I say will be sweet music to all ears.

I will be subjective, generalizing and stereotyping on the verge of the irresponsible. Eastern African NGOs (not to speak of Governments!) are very complex animals.

As you may know MS (DVS) wants to reorient its training . Today we focus on our African partner organisations under the label: A "NGO Resource Centre."

The shift in policy started six years ago. We had for decades worked with government institutions as part of the official Danish development cooperation. We now saw cooperation with the wildly mushrooming NGO-sector as a chance to work more efficiently and meaningfully in Africa. As a Northern NGO believing in Democracy and a People's Centred Approach we wanted to contribute to the restoration of Civil Society. The search for Southern, like-minded partners began.

It became, however, increasingly clear, that the policy to place all eggs in the NGO-basket is a bit one-eyed. It may even work against the aim of strengthening civil society.

Consequently, I recently found myself writing the following footnote in a policy-paper on our NGO-centre. It is the most illogical footnote I have ever written, but it is still there in the manuscript. I quote:

"Like-minded development organisations" can also include government institutions. This is tacitly understood whenever the policy-paper mentions "NGOs."

It was easier some few years ago when one had a clear perception of clearly separated sectors: The State versus the Civil Society, the Government versus the Non-Government. Some even saw one sector as the "Goodies" as contrasted to the other, the "Badies."

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A very bright Standard 5 pupil once wrote in an essay on the topic "My Family:"

"Parents and children need each other: Without parents, no children, and without children we will have no future parents."

It is my point that the same *dualistic relationship* also applies to NGOs and Government. The two parties need each other: Non Governmental Organisations are logically defined by the existence of a government. Governments surely can exist without NGOs, but the question is how good and democratically the *governance*¹ will function without popular based organisations as players.

I also see the African NGOs and the Community Based Organisations as the only institutions which today can act as necessary intermediaries between the People and their Governments.

But if they function in a structure *totally* parallel to that of the State they will have a very limited role to play. As somebody has said:

"Small may be beautiful, but it may also be insignificant."

Some form of interplay - not necessarily a harmonious one - is a necessity for a process that empowers people, so that they will have more options in life, enjoy more of the human rights and get their share of the world's resources. This is what development is all about. *Basically it is a political process.*

¹ Governance = The sum total of institutionalised structures of Power, Authority, Interest Articulation and Mediation embedded in the State and in Civil Society.

See Halfani, M.: Local Government:
The State and Society in Tanzania:
an Examination of their Linkages.
1994

Interplay, complementarity, each sector its identity and speciality - is that what we see today? True NGOs with a solid, popular basis, can do wonders in the development work. This has been proven many times, and we can all name outstanding examples.

Unfortunately, I do not think they dominate the picture. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between Eastern African government institutions and NGOs. Just a few nagging comparisons:

Many NGOs are concentrating on delivery of services, which the government is supposed to take care of. And the NGOs do *not* do it more efficiently.

Many NGOs bear a strikingly resemblance to government bureaucracies with a marked hierarchical, internal structure.

The Leadership is often as authoritarian as in the typical government bureaucracy. The leadership may consist of ex-government bureaucrats who sought greener NGO-pastures.

Many NGOs are as corrupt as many government institutions.

Like governments NGOs prefer to argue, that they represent and are accountable to the people, to the grassroots. Is the argument always valid?

The reasons behind the blurred picture are many, and we find also differences between the Eastern African countries. Some common experiences are, however, shared: Colonisation and the later independent governments destroyed and created traditions that led to a certain type of State. Another explanation is found in the way Northern donors and NGOs have reproduced themselves on African soil.

Colonial powers disjoined Africa into Nation States of the European type². The state apparatus became over-developed when it related to the executive and the judiciary sector, but the legislative power remained highly centralized with the colonizer. The foundation for an autocratic type of government was laid.

At the same time Church organisations from Europe operated in the Africa delivering social welfare services. The tradition of private activity in this area was created.

It later developed into a multitude of church or community based self-help groups, cooperatives, and the like - a fragile but dynamic basis for later independence struggle and political parties. The groups were formed on a voluntary basis

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See Davidson, Basil: The Black Mans Burden
Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State
London 1992

primarily to fend for their members' specific interests and social welfare. They formed a locally based link between the people and the then government.

With independence the centralised, "incomplete" structure of the colonial state was inherited by governments struggling to create unity, keep the nations together and remain in power.

Party and Government nearly always became one and the same thing, and there was no space for the community based groupings to operate. Centralized government controlled from above most of what we normally call Civil Society.

It was a weak state-system not very congruent with the African reality where most people live by small subsistence farming. There was not a big need for such an extensive and complicated coordinating system.

I also think values from traditional society play a role in politics. The traditional society may be characterized as a *patronage* one. Leaders are patrons who expect and are expected to "make people happy" in order to remain in power. They distribute privileges and rather concrete benefits to their supporting clients.

For these reasons one author has likened the contemporary African State to "...a balloon suspended in mid-air [which] is being punctured by excessive demands and unable to function without an indiscriminate and wasteful consumption of scarce societal resources."³

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The weak government structure gradually made the International NGOs and other donors to look for alternative ways of delivering their services without *ballooning* them. Northern NGOs got huge increases in public funds to channel via partners in Africa. Northern governments began to fund projects or African NGOs directly.

So we saw a *donor driven* mushrooming of NGOs in the eighties. The fast driving donors were not the only factor. The development could not have taken place without other, well known structural and political changes in the societies. A consequence, however, was that far too many service NGOs were created in the image of Northern institutions. They were not expressing a need of people to reconstruct civil society, they were alienated from traditional social organisations, they had no local resource base neither in terms of finances nor as volunteers or

³ See Hydén, G.: No Shortcuts to Progress.
African Development Management in Perspective
Heinemann, Nairobi, 1983, p. 19

members. They were also naturally forced to be more accountable to their partners or donors than to the people they served⁴.

Many associations were formed because of a sincere wish to contribute radically to the development of society in the more liberalised environment. But the rapid, nearly uncontrolled expansion also made the sector attractive for people who could use it as a medium of a career or other rather selfish interests. The commitment to voluntarism sometimes is simply not there. This is for example what I can hear in my office:

“You don’t know Mr X? Oh, I thought so. He has now his own NGO....First he created another NGO, but it collapsed as he got problems with the Board. But I think he succeeded this time.”⁵

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Today we have a dire competition not only between the NGOs themselves, but - even more serious - between the NGO-sector and the government institutions. In futile attempts to regain control some governments have used not only unwise, but also very despotic and rude means. I understand the mistrust that many NGOs harbour, and also the unfortunate lack of constructive dialogue between the two sectors.

I do, however, also understand if a government tries to regulate a nearly anarchistic market. It is a problem if any briefcase NGO can advertise itself as the legitimate receiver of development funds normally allocated to the country as such. The problem remains, however, that a trustworthy intervention only can be done by institutions that are legitimate and clean themselves.

The situation will not improve before both parties sincerely recognise that they need each other. It is not enough just to call for a strong NGO-sector. The NGOs should out of pure self-interest also *demand* a strong government sector that in reality recognizes, nurtures and creates conducive frameworks for the participation and operation of NGOs.

It is also not enough just to lean back and wait while the State organs are transforming themselves according to new ideas like multipartism, structural adjustment and so on. Experience shows, that these formal changes alone do not further the process of democratic participation. Civil Society will only prosper and develop if it is actively given space to develop its own institutions.

⁴ One definition of NGOs have as central points that they are voluntarily formed, that they are controlled and managed by those people who have formed them, that they do not pursue personal profit or gain and that they functions independently within the laws of society. (The Commonwealth Foundation, 1995).

⁵ The quote is pure fiction. Any resemblance to any NGO or person is coincidental!

Therefore NGOs should spend some (considerable) time convincing the government that it is in *its* interest to make room for popular based participation, that even a critical watchdog or opposition is better than no opposition. It furthers the *sustainability* of the very system that the government is based upon. The NGOs should demand that the State gives the NGOs back to society.

I know that it is not an easy task. The requirement is that NGOs should engage in political work - but strictly avoid party-political work in order not to be perceived by Government as a threat. It has to be done anyway, and by the NGOs themselves⁶.

The NGOs are theoretically in a good position to do it. They can draw upon practical experience from the field and their contacts to the People. If the experiences are used as arguments, to identify crucial societal issues to be addressed, then a strong case can be built for lobbying. The strategy has been formulated as a rewriting of a known slogan. It now should be shouted out as:

*Think locally - act globally*⁷

If NGOs do not combine their service delivery with lobbying on structural/political matters then their effort is reduced to merely sympathetic welfare: Another Lady Bountiful dishing out soup for the needy poor.

It is here, *resource mobilization* comes into the picture. If NGOs want to influence governments, they are forced to have their own resource base, which is in tune with the local conditions. They need to demonstrate, that they have members who are dedicated to their mission, that they are independent financially and politically. If NGOs are clearly dependant on outside donors and single projects they soon find themselves alienated from both government and the people they should serve.

Fundraising is a very efficient means to mobilize interest for a just cause and to recruit members, but the message behind the efforts must be selected with care. A sentimental appeal to give money just for feeding hungry people can raise a lot of money. But it can at the same time be detrimental to an effort to empower the poor. It should be a golden rule, that fundraising should clearly reflect the aim of the organisers and the use they want to make of the money⁸.

⁶ It will destroy both the NGO-sector and the Government sector, if the NGOs fearfully or passively push Northern donors ahead of them to do the lobbying.

⁷ See Clark, J.: Democratizing Development
The Role of Voluntary Organizations
London, 1991, Chapter 14

⁸ A distasteful experience I had was to be asked to participate in organising a *Dinner Dance* at a five star hotel to collect money for dying refugees in Kagera. I do not agree with the dictum that the end justifies the means.

Governments and NGOs also have a mutual interest in a successful private fundraising. It all helps to minimize the NGO-dependency of donors, and it can even help to revive the link between the two sectors. Sometimes you can convince governments to contribute with a share proportional with what people themselves can generate.

Demonstrative independence is, however, only a necessary, but not sufficient precondition for lobby work on behalf of good governance. The most important is, that the NGOs are clear on their own political agenda and mission - and that they do not let donors or aleatoric availability of project funds divert them. Here most NGOs have a lot of Organisational Development work to do. Our organisations should constantly nurture our specialities and thereby advertise a clear profile⁹.

The seriously lobbying organisation should also look for a restricted number of like-minded allies. Not only among the multitude of NGOs in the South and in the North, where I think one should look for serious, membership based, non-profit partners¹⁰.

The most difficult is, however, to search strategically for “partner” institutions in the government sector. They *are* there, as individuals or groups, often at local level or in some segregated areas within the public sector. A cooperation will be highly beneficial to both parties, especially in the long run. The idea will spread to others.

I admit it is a long process, but it has to be initiated. Let us politicize our organisations, cooperate with the antagonists, create awareness, lobby and put pressure on everybody in defence of civil society!

⁹ This is also important if one embarks on fundraising. No one wants to contribute to an organisation that cannot explain in brief and very concretely why it needs money.

¹⁰ Research indicates, that what is called “first-party organisations” have the greatest potential to promote a people’s centred development. This type of organisations have three important characteristics:

- They are mutual benefit associations, serving the *members interests*.
- They have a *democratic structure* (the members have authority over leaders).
- They are *self reliant* and do not depend on outside initiatives and funding.

See Korten, David C.: Getting to the 21st Century
Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda
USA 1990, Chapter 9

Here at the closure of my presentation you could rightfully ask: With what right do you - as a foreigner - tell us all this?

One rather bad answer could be that, "well, I have been invited."
I believe that a better answer is, that most of what I have said also applies to my own part of the World.
In many ways we are in the same boat.
Together we can rock it!

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