

Can NGOs Aid Good Governance and Sustainable Development in Africa?

---Some Theoretical Insights

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Abstract

All over the world, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operate in different spheres of life. In some countries, they are as powerful (if not more powerful than) as national governments. They command wider access to foreign aid than the respective governments where they operate. They are easier heard by international development and donor agencies. Their relevance are well focused in their recognition by bodies like United Nations, European Union, African Union, other multinational organizations and powerful governments. This is especially the case with foreign NGOs, who in most cases, in the point of view of some of the international agencies, are saints. They do no evil; they are not corrupt; they are for the poor; and above all are the 'third eye'. In the recent times, developments have brought these perceptions to query. Many now ask whether NGOs are actually progressive partners in the quest for sustainable development. It is the growing popularity of this question that forms the major issue in this paper. The paper strives to find out whether NGOs can effectively aid development, reduce poverty and stand against recent threats to health, environmental degradation and social deformities in most of the world societies, especially within the African context.

Introduction

No doubt, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), by their structures and missions, are key agents of development. They have come to be in order to complement the jurisdictional roles of governments and the collective efforts of individuals towards human development and environmental sustainability (Tandon, 1991). In all they countries where they operate, NGOs assume different forms, and sometimes operate almost in parallelism with government agencies and departments (Baneke, 2000). They are also in most cases referred to as not-for-profit nongovernmental organizations – thus depicting their independence from governments and philanthropic motive. According to a World Bank's working definition, NGOs are "private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development" (The World Bank, 1996:4). Such organizations may come in the forms of charities, foundations, associations, nonprofit corporations (NPOs), and private voluntary organizations (PVOs) (Karla, 1999).

Their popularity and relevance has grown in widths and breadths over the years. According to the National Center For Policy Analysis (2002), in 2002, it was estimated that over 25,000 NGOs operated all over the world. This again is well focus in their recognition by bodies like United Nations, European Union, African Union, other multinational organizations and powerful governments. This is especially the case with foreign NGOs, who in most cases, in the point of view of some of the international agencies, are saints. They do no evil; they are not corrupt; they are for the poor; and above all are the 'third eye'. Due to the way they operate, the increasing influence of these foreign NGOs has at the same time directly ignited increase in the number of local NGOs of different nature in most of the developing countries. Consequently, there is today a sharp increase in the membership of such organizations in the past two decades working in war-torn, hunger-wrecked and diseases-infested poor countries, most of which are in Africa.

The relevance of these organizations cannot however be over-emphasized, especially in those needy societies. They have helped to facilitate achievements in basic human development as measured by the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP, 2000). Their key functions have been in the area of: contribution of valuable information and ideas; advocating effectively for positive change; providing essential operational capacity in emergencies and development efforts; and generally helping to increase the accountability and legitimacy of the global governance process (Global Policy Forum, 1999). They have also been in the front lines in the fight for human rights, equality, freedom, and social justice, as well as the campaign against AIDS/HIV. Through relentless campaigning, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and the Ford Foundation, alongside thousands of much smaller organizations, have succeeded in gaining immense power in placing human rights issues - as they interpret them - high on governmental agendas (Steinberg, 2003).

Essentially, their existence cuts across developed and developing nations, though sometimes serving different purposes and maintaining differing structures. For instance, whereas NGOs have grown in sophistication and in qualitative service delivery in the developed countries, in the most developing countries, the reverse is just the case. In the recent times, the level of legitimacy usually accorded to this set of organizations have come under serious scrutiny and visible opposition, especially within the poor countries where their services are mostly needed. With the persistent high level of poverty, hunger and diseases in these countries, the critics seem to have had their ways. Part of the main argument is that CSOs are extended organs of the Western countries and their agents; and rather than serve the interest of the local people, NGOs are meant to serve donor interests. The membership, structures and operations of these organizations have equally come under heavy criticisms in the recent times. Along this line, it has been demonstrated that:

A corollary to the above is the fact that most of the civil society organizations, especially as manifested in NGOs, share the alignment and project of the state-

based elite in the form of self-advancement and personal accumulation. The emergence of what have come to be termed "MONGOs" (my own NGO) that are run as personal or family outfits points to this eventuality. Against this background, it is the chief executives of the NGOs who, in the process, get "empowered" partly vis-à-vis the state but mainly vis-à-vis rank and file members of civil society. The speed with which some NGO executives have transformed themselves from modest living standards to bourgeois lifestyles complete with state-of-the-art limousines and palace-like residences is a glaring pointer to the fact that some of these outfits are largely avenues for accumulation within civil society much as the state has remained an arena for self-aggrandizement with regard to the political class. In essence they are, to paraphrase Frantz Fanon, sources of "primitive advancement" within a political game of democratization (Nasong'o, 2002).

Prevalent in such claim is that NGOs in most developing countries are used to advance political/personal interest; and are today run not within the framework of the World Bank definition given above – with inbuilt characteristic of non-profit-non-governmental – but like profit making, capitalistic, business-like set of organizations. This clearly explains the views of "The Economist" Magazine, when it argued that:

As they get larger, NGOs are also looking more and more like businesses themselves. In the past, such groups sought no profits, paid low wages -- or none at all -- and employed idealists. Now a whole class of them, even if not directly backed by businesses, have taken on corporate trappings. Known collectively as BINGOs, these groups manage funds and employ staff which a medium-sized company would envy. Like corporations, they attend conferences endlessly. Fund-raisers and senior staff at such NGOs earn wages comparable to the private sector. Some bodies, once registered as charities, now choose to become non-profit companies or charitable trusts for tax reasons and so that they can control their spending and programmes more easily. Many big charities have trading arms, registered as companies. One manufacturing company, Tetra Pak, has even considered sponsoring emergency food delivery as a way to advertise itself. Any neat division between the corporate and the NGO worlds is long gone. Many NGOs operate as competitors seeking contracts in the aid market, raising funds with polished media campaigns and lobbying governments as hard as any other business. Governments and UN bodies could now, in theory, ask for tenders from businesses and NGOs to carry out their programmes. It seems only a matter of time before this happens. If NGOs are cheap and good at delivering food or health care in tough areas, they should win the contracts easily (The Economist, 2000).

Undoubtedly, these allegations are true and found. They in no small measure represent a true picture of current NGO businesses in developing countries of Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America. This has in effect depleted the basis upon which the organizations are founded and operated.

The negativities of the structure and operations of these organizations have not yet succeeded in destroying the fact that they constitute the strongest allies and trusted agents of the Western governments and international development organizations, especially as it affects their relationship with and for the third-world countries of Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America. This is critically so in the fight against poverty, illiteracy, diseases and environmental degradation. Notwithstanding this also, NGOs are found to enjoy tremendous support of their respective home governments. Again, in recognition of how useful these organizations can be, many home governments have liberalized or are liberalizing laws, regulations, and other legal mechanisms that permit and encourage the smooth operations of such organizations (Karla, 1999). According to Karla, the affected countries have equally begun to recognize, in addition to streamlining rules and regulations, the need to evolve administrative systems that are capable of permitting, encouraging, and regulating the existence and fiscal status of NGOs.

However, this growth in affluence and popularity of, as well as the local and international supports for NGOs has not been very compensating. This is especially so as it affects the Sub-Saharan African region. Of the well-publicized international efforts to alleviate poverty and save people from deadly diseases in the region, this part of the world has remained the poorest by all measures. The region records the greatest number of NGO advocacy roles, yet governance issues in each of the countries are not only chronic but crisis prone. The whole situation could have got to an extent of generally querying the relevance of NGOs existence the world-over, if not for the success stories they have recorded in other parts of the world. In explaining the basis of its relationship with NGOs, for instance, the World Bank (1996:1) states that it recognizes the important role the nongovernmental organizations, both local and international, play in meeting the challenges of development.

So if these organizations succeeded in other places, why have they not been able to effectively complement the local and international efforts to save Africa from its doldrums of economic and social ills? If NGOs inefficiency can be linked to environmental, economic and social peculiarities of Africa, can they be restructured to match the present complexities and challenges of sustainable development in the continent? These are questions deeply pried on in this paper. The rest of the paper is organized in four parts: Part one examines the economic relevance of NGOs; part two looks at the prevailing operational shift and complexities facing this kind of organizations; part four is on "filling the existing gaps"; while part five concludes the paper.

The Economic Relevance of NGOs

NGOs are indispensable because of the fact that there is a limit to what governments are willing and able to do for their respective citizens. Generally, their roles range from providing relief services, conserving the environment, contributing to development projects or simply battling with governments over human rights issues (BBC News World Edition, 2004). They are particularly critical in circumstances where State funds are limited, political situations are fluid, natural disasters resulting from both predictable and unpredictable environmental circumstances occur, ethnic strife is rampant, and the level of per capita income severely restricts the ability to purchase needed goods and services – social, educational and economic (Asamoah, 2003). This explains why donor interests and NGOs activities are more common in some places or at some period than the other. For instance, in war-torn nations like Somalia, Sudan, Iraq, Sierra Leone, Iraq, Congo, Rwanda, Ivory Coast, where governance mechanism have been very greatly rendered inactive, the role and influence of the civil society have been of great leverage, especially in helping the impoverished, the sick and the prisoners. Also in most disaster areas like the Eskimo, the Nigeria Delta (in Nigeria), NGOs are playing lofty roles. During the dictatorial military regimes in Nigeria, too many of such organizations existed as advocacy and human rights groups. This explains why the practice of NGOs and civil society organizations is more prevalent in the poor countries of Sub-Saharan Africa, South-East Asia and Latin America. Even the curriculums of international/western NGOs make them look like they were formed with Africa primarily in the minds of the promoters.

NGOs serve as partners and facilitators in development (Muchena, 2004). They serve as media for intermediation between international institutions and poor communities, especially in an era of face-offs in home countries. In crisis-infested societies, they are the voices of the weak and suppressed. They take initiative and provide voice for unheard interests, play monitoring role by improving accountability and reducing incentives for corruption in governments, and promote environmentally sound strategies (The World Bank, 2003:41). Most importantly, they have come to be recognized as veritable sources/channels of foreign aid to poverty-infested communities. It has along this line, been argued that:

Countries around the world are seeking to encourage the growth of an independent, voluntary not-for-profit sector -- sometimes known as civil society -- to serve as a partner -- with the government and for-profit sectors -- for social and economic development. NGOs are moving beyond charity and self-help activities, and are increasingly being asked to perform important services once the exclusive province of the government. They are being encouraged to seek funding for their expanded activities not only from charitable contributions and volunteer services, but, increasingly, from government grants and contracts and by encouraging business sponsorship and cooperation in new social and development-oriented activities (Karla, 1999).

The support for this group of organizations also arises more from their impressed efficiency and less bureaucratic characteristics in service delivery, especially when compared with government agencies and departments. According to Karla (1999), NGOs are often more efficient than government agencies because (1) they can attract volunteers and monetary donations, which lowers their costs vis-à-vis the government; (2) they compete among themselves for grants, donations, and, in some cases, contracts, which often leads to cost savings; and (3) small, local NGOs have better information as to the needs, and how best to meet those needs, of the people to be served, than a large and often distant bureaucracy. The argument goes further to indicate that a well structured NGO is helpful in the following ways: (a) by permitting individuals to pursue their various notions of the common good, the not-for-profit sector helps build the pluralism essential to a civil society; (b) by giving legal implementation to the rights of freedom of expression and freedom of association, laws permitting NGOs create strong support for the institutions of democracy; (c) by enforcing appropriate principles of transparency and accountability, laws regulating NGOs promote social stability and the rule of law; (d) by helping to promote civil society, democracy, and stability, NGOs strengthen the development of economic prosperity and a market economy; and (e) by frequently providing social goods and services more efficiently than the government, NGOs contribute to social well-being.

Essentially, the exclusive preservation of certain kind of roles for nongovernmental institutions makes their existence indispensable virtually in every society. In politics, they exist to advocate for the inclusion of the politically weak members of the society; in the event of natural disaster, they are there to render helpful/emergency relief services without invitation nor expectation of economic gains; in times of war, the essential areas of NGOs is to provide relief and help protect women and children from war crimes and other adverse effects; in times of epidemic, they also arise to the challenges of providing for the health needs of the people, offering technical advices on the prevention and cure of diseases, and helping governments search for permanent solutions against further spread; and under normal circumstances, they search for and take care of the poor and the marginalized. It is this primary (and sometimes unsolicited) and unpaid-for services of NGOs that have helped to attract them the fame they today enjoy. These great humanitarian services have equally made the existence of this group of organizations indispensable in both developed and undeveloped nations, poor and rich.

Even in peaceful societies, the imperfections of human beings have substantially undermined the ability of governments to adequately and equitably cater for all its citizens. In most countries, oppositions are highly left behind in government businesses; and as such should need a structure outside government, to continue to air their views and be heard. This explains why a nation need not be poor to benefit from the goodwill and roles of NGOs. Very few countries have reached the ideal level of sustaining the human condition at an optimal level, whatever the GNP and other indicators of

wealth, through dependence on government action alone (Asamoah, 2003). Even in such countries like the United States of America, Britain, France, Japan, Germany, etc., there are still, in existence, local and international NGOs whose main role is to help fill the gaps created by government's inadequacies.

Most NGOs, being not-for-profit oriented need enough goodwill and pool of resources to be able to effectively carry out their primary duties. At the same time, there are humanitarian/philanthropic donor agencies whose core objective is to advance the welfare of humanity. The meeting point between these agencies and the NGOs is 'funding'. The agencies provide the needed funds and technical assistance, while the NGOs carry out the jobs required. Often times, the two parties are seen working in partnership. More than any other institutional structure, for instance, the donor agencies favour the involvement of NGOs in poverty and community development programmes for several reasons. As explained by the World Bank (1996), NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) often have closest contact with the poor, are best able to help them directly, and are well suited to helping them identify their most pressing concerns and needs. Their local knowledge and expertise and their ability to foster and promote people's participation thus give them strong comparative advantages and can make them valuable and experienced allies. It has along this line been argued that:

The major advantages of NGOs include their flexibility, ability to innovate, grass-roots orientation, humanitarian vs. commercial goal orientation, non-profit status, dedication and commitment, and recruitment philosophy. Many are made up of volunteers so deeply committed to the NGOs mission that they are willing to undergo considerable hardships and no monetary compensation in order to carry out that mission. In addition to supporting innovation, NGOs may serve as pilots for larger anticipated projects, help to motivate and involve community based organizations whose constituents may be the primary beneficiaries of a larger project, serve as advocates or ombudspersons, and are in a unique position to share communication both horizontally and vertically (Asamoah, 2003).

Summarily, four major arguments can be deduced as to the continued preference and/or relevance of NGOs in approaches to tackling obstacles to sustainable development, in Africa and other poor nations of the world. First, we note the 'gap argument' – which stresses that government's structure and capacity in service delivery and in solving critical human problems may be limited; thus creating the need for complementary structures. Secondly, we identify the 'relevance argument' – which considers the environmental peculiarities of our modern society, and acknowledges the fact that deliberate oppression and marginalizing of the minority and the opposition creates the need for alternative structures that enable these group to relate with, consult and confront governments for their needs. Thirdly, we consider the 'emergency argument' – which exposes the ever-increasing

needs for NGOs to be used as media for providing relief programmes, rescue and protective operations in war-torn and crisis infested societies. Fourthly, we also consider the emerging trend in NGO formulation, which centers primarily on 'selfish/personal interest'. Essentially, it is this last argument that has undermined the legitimacy of NGO practice the world-over. Ironically, even those non-government organizations formed on the basis of the 'gap', 'relevance' or 'emergency' arguments are today drifting into the 'personal interest' theory. This again is especially so in poor countries where unemployment, lack of social welfare scheme and low per capita income constitute the basic reasons why people get into the practice of NGOs. The next section considers the nature and causes of this new development, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Current Shift and Complexities

NGOs have been indicted for not living up to expectation, and for drifting from their primary assignments and goals (Reusse, 2001). Taking cursory look at the prevailing circumstances in the Sub-Saharan African region, one can be quick to conclude that these organizations, like the governments they come to help, have had no significant impact on poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. They have instead become part of the problems. It is understandable that one of their major strengths lies in their ability to maintain institutional autonomy and political neutrality. In pursuit of goals outside the conventional goals for the establishment of non-government and non-profit making bodies, however, most of the NGOs have lost this all-important focus. No doubt, some are made up of volunteers so deeply committed to the NGOs mission that they are willing to undergo considerable hardships and no monetary compensation in order to carry out that mission. On the other hand, many have sort for the establishment of NGOs as a source of employment. In most African countries, school leavers compare getting a job with international NGOs with that of Oil Companies or Multinational Corporations, just for the size of their comparable pay packages. This points clearly to the fact that while the motive of the individuals who work with the NGOs is purely economically and profit-oriented, that of the organizations naturally may be humanitarian and not-for-profit based. It is this conflict of interests that have gone to undermine the effectiveness of the affected organizations. It has equally caused a major drift in the pursuit of the primary objectives of NGOs, as contained in their respective national charters and donor agencies guidelines/requirements. The principle can be clearly explained by the fact that 'giving a hungry man food to share among other hungry men naturally demands that he shall first of all satisfy his own hunger before allotting the remaining to the others'. In the course of doing this, if the food is not enough to satisfy his own urge, the rest gets nothing out of the slot.

It is these distortions in the ownership and compositions of the employees of most NGOs in most African countries that have in the main given rise to the pursuit of personal/selfish interests. In the same vein, the clamour for NGO independence from government has contributed to the regulatory

neglect they enjoy today. For some NGOs, government is intrinsically banned from interfering with their ownership, operations and activities. They are left to operate within their own bounds. The excesses arising from this freedom have not only been abused by individuals floating NGOs, but have also lead to the fraudulent use of such organizations. A good case here is where few privileged individuals form NGOs to attract funds from international donor agencies for personal gains.

Just like individuals are blamed for using NGOs as a veil for corruption and fraud in Africa, the economic and social circumstances in the continent are also responsible for this ugly trend. Essentially, NGOs most usually arose out of the pressure of economic and social repression. The exacerbation of frequent conflicts within the region has called for the attention of NGOs, at least to solve prevailing problems arising thereon. In some cases, combine efforts of several humanitarian agencies (including NGOs and CSOs in general) and international organizations have helped to quench the conflicts. The expectation however is that the specific tenureship of an NGO within a geographical bound or within a specific operational scope should terminate when the problem for which they are established ceases to exist. Experiences have instead shown that this is not the case with the practice of NGOs in many countries of Africa that have experienced such conflicts. The situation has clearly been explained by *The Economist* (2000) - with an indication that NGOs can also become self-perpetuating; and when the problem for which they were founded is solved, they seek new campaigns and new funds.

Commonly, the observation is that these non-governmental organizations that actually helped in successfully seeing to the end of crisis turn out to devise strategies for perpetuating themselves within the area, even reasonably beyond the post-conflict era. The threat inherent in this style of operation is exemplified by *The Economist* as thus:

One example is the Ngora refugee camp in Tanzania, a camp for refugees from the terrible atrocities of the war in Rwanda. The Ngora refugee settlement became the second-biggest city in Tanzania (after Dar-es-Salaam). However, it was not under the control of the Tanzanian government, it was controlled by the NGOs. Each NGO seemed to have its own "territory" where it flew its own flag. The message seemed to be that rival NGOs were saying to each other "If you stay away from my refugees, I will stay away from yours". Many of the NGOs did not want the camp to close because they would lose their influence. The settlement was becoming a permanent city because the NGOs provided facilities that the refugees would not have if they returned to their homes in the hills of Rwanda.

The above situation has given rise to NGOs pursuing objectives that are not necessary of any social or economic interests to communities they serve. In another respect, the fact that the more

popular NGO gets with donor agencies, the more it is able to attract more funds have dared most of such organization to continue to operate at reasonably longer period than necessary, creating unnecessary empires and constituencies that have no socioeconomic relevance.

The real question therefore borders on whose interest the NGOs serve beyond this 'useful' period (BBC News, 2004). Is it government political interest, community social interests, donor agencies' interests, owners' interest, profit or financing interests? Again, what is the justification for the existence of the pursuit of any stakeholders' interests, order that those of the community/society. Simply, experiences have shown that for those NGOs that arose out of emergency circumstances, their usefulness terminates at the end of the problems that called their attention. Resources should then be moved away from the affected areas or individuals. If not there may be less incentives or motives for the operators to pursue clear-cut goals for human development and environmental sustainability.

Not only does the 'personal interest' theory arise among local operators of NGOs. It has equally brought foreign NGOs to great criticisms in most poor countries where they operate. Many of them have been accused of serving interests far from helping the poor and the oppressed. It has for instance been asserted that:

In the last few years, NGOs have become part of life in Africa. There is almost nowhere in Africa that does not have some kind of contact with NGOs. You see their 4-wheel-drive vehicles everywhere. They have become part of the landscape, like the climate, or the sun, or the hills. But they are not truly part of Africa. They are all financed and controlled - directly or indirectly - by their rich Western governments. They are all managed by Europeans or North Americans. Some of the most powerful foreign NGOs seem to be like civilian branches of their home governments, who give them a lot of money. Foreign NGOs enjoy the support of their governments, their embassies, and companies from their own countries. This wealth and support gives them a lot of influence, and it puts them above the community groups and local NGOs of the countries where they work (Abdul-Raheem, 2000).

Another area of confusion is funding. Both the sources and application of funds for effective running of civil society organizations have constituted a great area of conflicts, and are in effect the key sources of the problems inherent in these organizations. Unfortunately, in most of the countries in the region, governmental regulatory policies do not touch on NGO funding, except for the fact that they are exempted from certain kinds of taxation (BBC News, 2004). This position is informed by the fact that they are considered as not-for-profit organization. This explains clearly the gap that exists between the level of financial commitments of any NGO on any project; and the aspect/scope of social functions or non-profit oriented development areas they pursue. Clearly, without strong

regulatory provisions on the finances of NGOs, it will continue to be difficult for them to partner effectively in the course of poverty alleviation, national development and environment sustainability.

Similar to this is the expenditure profiles of these organizations. The growing need for luxurious office apartments, expensive vehicles, rising profile of paid-staff and so on, have contributed to this increased expenditure profile. These contrast sharply with the intensity of problems faced by the people for which they NGOs were established to serve. According to one commentator,

Disturbing though is the lavish spending by these NGOs on employees (believe you me, its just excessive!). If you can get a job with an NGO, especially the Aids and sustainable development ones, then your life will change overnight. This is clearly widening disparities in society and creating serious rifts in classes of the 'haves and have-nots'. So what really is the mission of NGOs? (BBC News, 2004).

The above review shows clearly the difficult operating circumstances the present day NGOs have found themselves. As indicated, many of such organizations in the bid to restructure their activities and achieve sustainability have chose the alternative of operating like business outfits – striving to make more profit to sustain themselves. This evolving approach has undermined the core objective of conventional non-governmental/non-profit kind of organizations. There is therefore a consensus of opinions that the present operating structure of NGOs in Africa does not match the idea of having them as effective partners for good governance and sustainable development. Hence, there is need for a comprehensive overhauling. The case of sustainability, both in the existence of the organizations and the lasting nature of their achievements, is best sort for not by retaining/maintaining NGOs that lack defined focus, but by ensuring the currency and relevance of the missions of the organizations at any point in time.

No doubt, all hands are needed on deck to help African Continent in her quest to reduce poverty; ensure sound and operational democracy that guarantees peace, equity and growth; and maintain healthy environment. There is no gain reemphasizing that NGOs play key roles as agents in sustainable development. But this has proved the case more in organized and development society, than in the Continent. As was raised by Lipschutz (2005), there remain serious questions that are yet to be addressed in discussions of sustainable development: given existing political institutions and realities, can sustainable development be achieved without addressing the underlying conditions of social conflict? We join Lipschutz to ask this pertinent question: Can the assistantship efforts of donor agencies towards international and local NGOs help to achieve sustainable development in Africa amidst the current social ills/rifts and economic realities? How can the workings of these organizations be enhanced to contribute to solving the underpinning factors and consequently

contributing to lasting peace and development in Africa? The next section examines certain measures consistent with this desire.

The need for a Practice that Enhances Good Governance and Sustainable Development

From the on-going, it is clear that without a shift in the structure and operating focus of NGOs in Africa, their existence would continue to be under serious criticism, suspicion and of no socioeconomic effect. They would as well continue to face the peculiarities of lack of focus and clear-cut action-plan on how to save the region from the verge of human disaster. Based on the issues raised above, some of the areas that need to be redressed in order to make NGOs effective partners for good governance and sustainable development are: (i) NGOs relationship with development partners like the home governments, other local non-for-profit organizations, international NGOs, international governments and their development agencies, and the private sector; (ii) the regulatory practices that respect the independence feature of NGOs, while at the same time checkmate the reckless activities of some individuals operating under the clothe of not-for-profit bodies; (iii) evolving necessary financial practices that support and facilitate aid delivery to the poor, without bureaucratic and fraudulent hindrances; and (iv) ensuring the effective inclusion and coverage of NGOs in formulating and implementing economic policies that are geared towards helping the poor, both at the national, regional, and international levels.

NGOs relationship with development partners - like the other local non-for-profit organizations, international NGOs, national and international governments, international development agencies, and the private sector need to be redefined. The present practice where NGOs are merely seen used, as implementing agents and consultants by the international donor agencies, for instance, does not seem to have yielded enough result. The World Bank, for instance, does not fund NGOs directly; the most common way for an NGO to receive project funds is by working as a paid consultant or contractor to the borrower (The World Bank, 1996:10). It is this age-long habit of treating NGOs as contractors that have pushed individuals running these organizations in Africa to look at the structure as an alternative business structure for pursuing World Bank contracts; and subsequent push towards profitability. There should be requirement for adequate networking between local NGOs and their international counterparts. As a condition for getting local NGOs involved in projects, they should be meant to provide evidence of affiliation and/or collaboration with international NGOs and more established local counterparts.

Forging a better relationship with government, instead of keeping strictly to the independent status, can lead to the understanding that both sectors complement each other in the functioning of the society; and may equally make government feel at ease in contracting NGOs to provide services they traditionally provide (Newman, 2000). Similarly there is a need for an appropriate regulatory

framework that respects NGO independence, while at the same time checkmating the reckless activities of some individuals operating under the clothe of not-for-profit bodies. Apart from the requirement, in most countries, that NGOs be registered before they are allowed to operate, no other regulatory details as to the operating guidelines exist. This is perhaps the main reason why there are complexities and loss of focus among various NGOs in most of the countries. It is therefore necessary that countries get involved in regulating the structure and nature of NGOs.

Financial practices of most of the African NGOs are very doubtful and need to be reviewed, to support and facilitate aid delivery to the poor, without bureaucratic and fraudulent hindrances. One way of achieving this is to ensure that the financial activities of these organizations are properly reported, following the national or international accounting standards. Since the organizations serve the public, use public goodwill to garner resources to themselves and adopt structures provided by the public for their legitimacy, one expects that they should as well be accountable to the public. But at present, no national law anywhere in Africa requires NGOs to make their accounts public. Except for the international NGOs, no local NGO does publish its accounts for public consumption. One best way to guarantee proper accountability would be to have in place national legislation that require NGOs to publish their annual accounts and statement of results at the end of every year or even half yearly, and report same periodically to the respective commissions in-charge of registering business and non-business organizations.

Evidently, certain economic policies tend to undermine the effectiveness of these organizations, not just by these provisions, but also in most cases as a result of their ambiguity in issues affecting NGOs. In some African countries, economic policies do not even recognize this acclaimed special place of NGOs in national development. This ambiguity sometimes creates big lapses for some fraudulent minded individuals to misuse the privilege that comes with promoting and operating nongovernmental agencies. This is especially so with fiscal policies. In most countries of Africa, for instance, such policies do not allow for tax preferences such as deductions or tax credits or rebates for contributions by individuals or commercial corporations or other commercial entities to a defined class of NGOs; and do not in most cases state the extent to which NGOs will be taxed on their income from economic activities (Karla, 1999). The only uniformity in fiscal treatment of NGOs among countries is in the area of tax exemption on profitability/income. But this is exclusively not enough since it is clear that in most case NGOs do not pursue profit goals.

There is need therefore for the authority involved to devise appropriate regulatory framework that would be capable of checkmating the excesses of members and managers of non-governmental organizations. Instead of restrictive pronouncements on the operations of NGOs, such legal framework should boldly be able to address the critical issues in the areas of duties, powers,

membership, responsibilities and liabilities of management and governing bodies of such organizations. One critical beginning point of an active partnership between government and CSOs is the establishment of laws and regulations [by government] governing the work of NGOs in a society (Sullivan, 2000). That is not to say that the independence and governance issues of nongovernmental organizations should be constrained. Such development is already taking place in Zimbabwe, where NGOs, by law, are being required by government the need to be accountable, to respect their constitution, submit work plans to a council appointed by a minister, and the thought that this will improve efficiency and transparency in the sector.

In a society where people are infested with ignorance as to rules and procedures, the best bet is usually for government to come out with streamlined guidelines and standardized system of operation that would aid individuals in their pursuits. Of course in developed countries like United States of America and Britain, the responsibility of developing governing instruments that allocate responsibilities and authorities and define operational procedure rest on the individual nongovernmental organizations. But in an economically vulnerable society like ours, such roles cannot be left in the hands of individual NGOs. The legislative arm of government should get more involved in evolving rules; policies and procedures for the running of such organizations based purely on national peculiarities and needs. There may be no need tolerating the establishment of idle bodies that are only interested in attracting funds without actually getting involved in service delivery.

According to Tandon (1999),

Strengthening Civil Society in contemporary context implies strengthening its material, institutional and ideological bases. It further implies new approaches to governance and politics. It implies strengthening "citizenship." The development NGOs can play strategic roles in this context through their programmes and activities. They can (as many do already) address the issue of recovering the material base of Civil Society through greater access to and control over the resources by the local communities and people's organizations. They can facilitate the process of generating informed public judgment and of becoming active citizenry.

Again, NGOs should be made important partners in the present wave of reformation going on all over the continent of Africa. As in every organized society, governments need to be accountable to civil society organizations, which in essence represent the core people in the development process. As argued by Tandon (1991),

The second dimension of this accountability are the mechanisms of critiquing, questioning, debating and rejecting policies, programs, approaches and decisions of the State, its agencies, agents, and officials. --- Civil Society is "supreme", not the

State. Thus any rules, policies and procedures that the State construes need to be examined by Civil Society. In order for Civil Society to develop informed opinion and build a public judgement on it, it needs to have access to information; the process of formulating those policies, laws, rules and procedures needs to be an open and public process; and mechanisms for arriving at public judgment need to be strengthened.

Unfortunately, opposition to government-held views and opinions is highly frowned at. This is why international agencies and donor organizations who have one stake or the other in the economic affairs of the continent should ensure that the legitimacy of each reform exercise is tied on its level of inclusion of agencies that have direct contact with the people, especially the poor. Diverting development aid from governments to NGOs does not make enough sense, since making the same aid available to weakly structured civil societies may not proffer a better option. The important point here hinges on the acclaimed need for reform - which in effect includes getting the NGOs to undergo through reformation alongside with government's economic and social structures and agencies. Even in their relationship with African local NGOs, foreign NGOs and international agencies should realize that project ownership and control is an important factor in the success or failure of such project. Indeed, foreign NGOs are respected for their skills in carrying out development projects that actually benefit ordinary Africans, but there should be adequate arrangement and programmes for transferring such skills to local NGOs (National Centre for Policy Analysis, 2002). This is expected to help reduce the suspicion that they are new colonialists, instilling dependency among Africans.

Generally, there is no doubt the fact that laying sound internal economic policies is a big step to sustainable development. It may not be the direct duty of non-governmental organizations to lay these policies. But their involvement and collaboration with governments can make them responsibly and more committed to the poverty and environmental sustainability alleviation courses. Such can even add to the acceptability and goodwill of the reform programmes to the creditor and donor nations, while at the same time attracting the much desired local supports and ownership (Bsau et al., 2000:10). The reality of this advocacy is strongly supported by the Vice President of the World Bank in his assertion that:

The World Bank's poverty reduction mission and sustainable development efforts mean working across traditional sectoral boundaries in environment, agriculture, health, education, energy, water and sanitation, social development, and infrastructure. Our approach to sustainable development means being committed to building long-term collaborative working relationships with partners in the public and private sectors and with civil society to build capacity and help our clients achieve their sustainable development objectives (Leautier, 2002).

As it is today, there are lots of gaps that NGOs need to fill to be able to achieve sustainable growth and development. It is for instance observed that one of the reasons why Africa has lesser prosperity than the Latin America lies on the levels of scientific research, education and training in its natural resource-base sectors (Wood, 2002:6). Is Africa not privileged to have enough manpower capable of achieving such fit? The answer is no. There is indeed documented evidence that of the few scientists and engineers in Africa, many have left the continent in recent decades in search of greener pastures overseas. One area where NGOs can contribute to this is to get more involved in governance issues, especially since it is clear that most of these Africans in the Diaspora would not come back to the continent unless there is general improvements in governance, as well as the creation of more and better-paying jobs in their specific fields (Wood, 2002:28). Even in terms of raising the level of skills and institutions to support the development process, NGOs should play more active role. Three-quarters of the 32 countries classified by the United Nations as having low human capacity are in Africa; and it is this mobility of skilled Africans that has exacerbated the problem of impotency of skills and institutional capacity (The World Bank, 2002:24). While many NGOs concentrate on politics, few are working on the area of education and capacity building. In Nigeria, for instance, of the 647-registered civil society organizations, over 60 percent primarily concentrate on advocacy and awareness raising (UNICEF, 2002).

Even among the majority playing advocacy roles, no meaningful achievement has been made. Corruption is rampant, political crisis is almost at its peak and abuse of human rights is still notably high. This again based on the fact that NGOs and other organizations of civil society have in the past shown greater interest in the economies of corrupt (Abed and Gupta, 2002:5).

NGOs in Africa should build into themselves the capacity to advance the course of anti-corruption. The habit of government checking itself, as is obtainable in most African countries, has serious failed. Our own non-governmental organizations should emulate the foreign NGOs who have established structures to check national and international corruption. As it stands today, African NGOs are yet to ask for a place in the Peer Review Mechanism – an important aspect of the NEPAD agenda. Neither have International NGOs called for such all important position.

In their advocacy role, NGOs need to build also enough data-base that is capable of enabling them argue convincingly against government's attempts to maintain deliberate secrecy in its operations. This database can come in the form of well-researched timely reports not only on their respective operations, but also on major developments in the economies, politics and social lives of people. This is in recognition of the fact that NGO Reports offer alternative sources of information for evaluating developments overseas Scott et al. (2002). Unfortunately, the fact that most of these organizations

lack capacity to police government operations has helped to perpetuate fiscal abuses. In the area of budgeting for instance, very few NGOs in Africa actually follow up errors and omissions normally recorded in government's annual financial estimates and projections. Few keep independent tracks of critical economic indicators in the areas of inflation, unemployment, interest rates, accident and mortality rates, and industry capacity utilization. This is an important area these organizations need to get deeply involved.

Conclusion

NGOs are indispensable in the current economic dispensation in most African countries of the world. Rising level of poverty, diseases (especially HIV/AIDS and other endemic diseases), political conflict, environmental degradation and so on have challenged the old tradition of allowing government and corporations in-charge of economic and social affairs. Today, independent nongovernmental not-for-profit organizations have risen to fill the development gaps that have been created by the current trend. But these organizations have neither contributed much in tackling the key issues of development, nor in creating sincere and objective governance structure. Since 1982 when the World Bank initiated its official relationship with NGOs, for instance, no meaningful impact has been recorded either in alleviating hunger or achieving environmental sustainability. This points out clearly to the fact that something is wrong with the present structure and operational procedures of these organizations, especially within the Sub-Saharan African region where economic and social issues have remained persistently repressive.

There is therefore an urgent need to reexamine the way NGOs generally work all over the world, to make them regain appropriate institutions for sustainable and equitable development. Clearly, as argued by the World Bank (2003:37), empowering NGOs and making them more effective will create a forum where people work with each other to plan a future for themselves, their families, and their larger communities. Urgently African NGOs need to realign themselves to be able to keep up with the growing development complexities, especially in the era of dwindling international aid and assistance. Four points agenda suggested here include mending the relationship between NGOs with development partners like the home governments, other local non-for-profit organizations, international NGOs, international governments and their development agencies, and the private sector; developing regulatory practices that objectively and concisely respect the independence feature of NGOs; evolving necessary financial practices that support and facilitate aid delivery to the poor, without bureaucratic and fraudulent hindrances; and ensuring the effective inclusion and coverage of NGOs in formulating and implementing economic policies. Nongovernmental organisations can indeed serve as effective agents of good governance and sustainable development. But that is only if they are given the necessary structure and operational focus.

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