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NGOs & the Development Industry

Mike Powell & David Seddon

In his anthropological critique of 'development' Mark Hobart points out that, above all, 'it is useful to remember that development is big business' (Hobart, 1993:2). In his notorious onslaught on The Lords of Poverty (p. 42), Graham Hancock refers to the 'development industry',

...financed largely by the official aid of rich countries, mandated to promote 'development' in the poor ones, it is an industry that employs thousands of people around the world to fulfil a broad range of economic and humanitarian objectives. The Wall Street Journal once referred to it as 'the largest bureaucracy in history devoted to international good deeds'. I prefer to think of it as 'Development Incorporated'.

Like all big businesses, the development industry not only responds to global demand but has a way of shaping the world and its 'needs' in its own interests. Indeed, there are grounds for arguing that the development industry has now become a monstrous multinational alliance of global corporations, a kind of juggernaut. 'Juggernaut' is defined by the Concise Oxford Dictionary as follows: Hindi, Jagganath; Sanskrit, Jagannatha (jagat = world + natha = lord). The idol of Krishna, eighth avatar of Vishnu, at Puri, dragged every year in procession on a huge car, under the wheels of which devotees are said to have formerly thrown themselves; and, by derivation, as an institution, or notion, to which persons blindly sacrifice themselves or others. In common usage 'juggernaut' may refer to any enormous and irresistible force or institution.

The juggernaut of the development industry is dominated by the giant national (bilateral) agencies operating under the direction of the governments of the developed industrial capitalist states (which are, in effect, the parent companies of their 'aid' agency subsidiaries), and by the international (multilateral) agencies linked for the most part to the United Nations, but also including the major conglomerates of the European Union, OPEC and so on (in which the interests of the national governments are represented through various forms of voting rights). In more recent years, the industry as a whole has come to be dominated, both in terms of strategy and lending policy, by the so-called Bretton Woods International Financial Institutions (IFIs), notably the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

Ten years ago, in 1986, official aid flows totalled $46bn. Of this, roughly $37bn came through the so-called 'bilateral agencies' from 18 Western industrial states – led by the USA ($10bn), Japan ($6bn), France ($5bn), West Germany ($4bn), Italy ($2bn), the Netherlands ($2bn), the United Kingdom ($2bn), Canada ($2bn) and Sweden ($1bn). If 'Development Incorporated' had been a private sector corporation, it would have ranked as one of the largest in the world, outranking even Standard Oil of California, Unilever or IBM, and vastly larger than BASF, Bayer, Siemens, Phillips, Nestle, Hitachi or Volkswagen. By the end of the 1980s, annual aid flows had reached an annual total of around $50-60bn.
In 1995, the total official development aid provided by the 18 Western industrial states amounted to about $54 million billion – led now by Japan ($14bn), with France ($8bn), Germany ($7bn), the USA ($7bn), the Netherlands ($3bn), the United Kingdom ($3bn), Sweden ($2bn), Denmark ($2bn), Italy ($2bn), Spain ($1bn), Norway ($2bn), Switzerland ($1bn), and Belgium ($1bn) as the major players. Despite the reality of cuts in aid budgets by the governments of the Western industrial states during the 1980s and 1990s as a percentage of GNP, the development industry is larger and more extensive than ever.

Over the last decade or so, however, the industry has been undergoing a significant restructuring. The development industry consists not just of the bilateral government agencies, but also of the multilateral agencies of the UN (including the World Bank), the European Development Fund and the regional banks, through which increasing flows of funds are channelled and which have come to exercise enormous power and influence over governments and people of ‘the developing countries’. During the latter part of the 1980s in particular, the scale of operations of the multilateral agencies increased significantly, although during the 1990s they have increasingly suffered from the general reduction in ‘aid’ budgets of the richer countries. The World Bank’s lending commitments alone increased from $2.1bn in 1973 to $8.8bn in 1981 and $10.3bn in 1982 (according to Hayter & Watson, 1985); by 1987 the total loan commitments of the World Bank amounted to nearly $20bn (Hancock, 1989). This dwarfs the other UN specialised agencies which, by the end of the 1980s, were spending around $6bn a year on official development assistance or ‘development-related activities’. The UNDP, with 132 field offices and an annual budget of $1.7bn in 1995, is one of the largest of the UN specialized agencies and in many countries serves to coordinate the interventions of the other multilateral agencies.

In the 1990s, however, after a period in which an increasing proportion of public funds allocated to overseas ‘aid’ was distributed through the multilaterals, there has been a systematic effort to regain control over ‘aid’ allocations by national governments (and also to increase the ‘conditionality’ of lending), while at the same time reducing as far as possible overall levels of spending. This has resulted in a ‘cash crisis’ for the multilaterals – all of which complain of not having sufficient support from their funding agencies (which include most importantly the governments of the major capitalist states). The UNDP, for example, as the largest of the UN specialized agencies, saw its core resources dwindle in absolute terms from just over $1bn in 1991 to $928mn in 1995 and as a percentage of overall contributions from 80 per cent of total funding to 55 per cent.

Another important and related change in the overall structure of the industry has been the increasing role of the Northern NGOs (again particularly in the last few years) in the disbursement of public funds for ‘aid’. When Graham Hancock published his sweeping critique of the international ‘development industry’, Lords of Poverty, in 1989, he explicitly ‘refrained from mounting an offensive against the voluntary agencies – for example, Oxfam, Save the Children Fund and Band Aid in Britain, or Catholic Relief Services, Operation California and Africare in the United States’. He did have criticisms of such organisations, but believed that, by and large, their staff were well motivated and their efforts worthwhile. ‘Furthermore’, he remarked most pertinently, ‘they are funded on a voluntary basis by contributions from the general public and thus are under considerable pressure to use properly the money they receive. They rarely do significant harm; sometimes they do great good’ (p. xiii). The same, he argued – throughout his book – could not be said for the official
aid agencies, whether multilateral (like the World Bank or the other UN specialised agencies) or bilateral (like the British government’s ODA).

Over the last decade, however, the international ‘development industry’ has come, increasingly, to involve and indeed in some ways to incorporate the so-called voluntary agencies or NGOs – both in the North and in the South – in such a way as to change dramatically the context within which they operate and for many within as well as outside ‘the NGO sector’ to give rise to increasing concern as to their ability to safeguard their traditional independence and to maintain their traditional role as partners in development with Southern NGOs and local communities. It is no longer the case that Northern NGOs are funded only ‘on a voluntary basis by contributions from the general public’; most are also funded – and have been to an increasing degree over the last few years – by bilateral and multilateral agencies. Since 1970, and more dramatically since the mid-1980s, the proportion of government funding for ‘aid’ channelled through non-government organisations (NGOs) has increased substantially. ‘Aid’ funds channelled through the NGOs increased from $2.7bn in 1970 to $3.6bn in 1983 and then to $7.2bn in 1990; during the 1980s as a whole, the rate of growth of official development aid to NGOs outstripped almost five-fold the growth in ODA itself (Fowler, 1992). The OECD estimated total Northern NGO spending at $9-10bn a year in the early 1990s (considerably more, if the figures are to be believed, than the UN specialised agencies); by the mid-1990s this figure must have increased.

Marcussen suggests that ‘on average it is estimated that NGOs today account for about 13 per cent of total ODA (official development assistance); this may well be an underestimate’. The increase has been especially remarkable (as Marcussen has pointed out in ROAPE No. 69, p. 406) in the case of the Scandinavian and other ‘like minded’ agencies, which now allocate up to 25 per cent of aid through NGOs. But, at the 1994 Copenhagen Summit, US Vice President Gore announced that ‘nearly half of the aid from ... USAID would within five years be provided to private organisations not direct to the poor world’s governments’ (quoted in The Economist, 18 March 1995, p. 15.). And it is not only in the West that the growth of NGOs as agencies for ‘development’ and as part of ‘the development industry’ has taken place. In Japan also (see the Briefing on Japanese aid in this issue), the recent growth in the number of development NGOs has been dramatic. This reflects both the growing importance of Japan as an ‘aid-giving’ nation and the extent to which the Japanese government has been explicitly directing funds for ‘development’ through NGOs, since 1989 in particular. On average – again according to Marcussen – a third of NGO funds stem from government sources, although the percentage varies considerably from case to case. He points out that in Denmark, the government and the ‘non-private sector’ is by far the largest single source of funding for the NGOs, in certain cases financing more than 80 per cent of total activities. It is also the case that multilateral agencies increasingly rely on NGOs for the implementation of projects. According to one source (Landell-Mills, 1992), the World Bank alone increased the number of projects in Africa implemented by associated NGOs from around seven a year between 1973 and 1987 to 44 by 1991 (equalling 55 per cent of all loans and credits accorded to Africa in that year).

In this issue of ROAPE we publish a number of articles which consider these changes in the industry and begin to consider their political and practical impact. The changes have taken place in response to a number of factors. First, although the talk of a crisis may be exaggerated – overall expenditure is, as we have seen, both enormous and still increasing – the industry has clearly suffered from a loss of confidence and credibility
in recent years. Decades of failed, often harmful mega-projects, gender blindness, tales of corruption and, above all, a lack of demonstrable progress in the development of Africa have caused many who work in the industry to re-examine its purpose. The last few years have witnessed a number of public soul searchings, most notably in the World Bank which now claims to be highly critical of its past opposition to social expenditure, especially in education, and of its failure to target help at the poor.

Some such soul searching may indeed be genuine. It may also, however, be prompted both by the serious questioning of the whole concept of aid (particularly in the US and UK where the heirs to the Reagan and Thatcher tradition remain politically and ideologically dominant) and from the highly critical attitude of the big new funder on the block, Japan, to the economic prescriptions of the Bretton Woods institutions over recent years. It is notable in this regard that whilst Japan is clearly pursuing a strategy to increase its world role, and is therefore interested in the UN voting power of African states, the US and the UK are, now that the cold war is ended, reconsidering their strategic and economic priorities. In so doing, they are likely to become more ‘penny-pinching’ as regards aid to Africa. The European Community remains a major source of aid funding, but its growing preoccupation with the future of the European Union itself and its relationship with neighbouring countries to the east and across the Mediterranean means that its focus is likely to be closer to ‘home’ in the future. Even France, which has, more than any other major power, cultivated its strategic role in Africa, is now (as Conté points out in this issue), rethinking its priorities and looking for a more ‘cost-effective’ approach to overseas assistance while in the US (as Cason points out) there is strong pressure for a substantial downgrading of official assistance to and involvement in Africa. All of this calls into question the long term security of aid flows to Africa, especially in the absence of clearly demonstrable positive results.

Faced with these problems, the aid industry has increasingly looked to the NGOs. They have appeared to offer the prospect of a different, and in many ways more acceptable, ‘face’ of development assistance. In addition to their frequently repeated, well publicised and popular critique of traditional aid practices, and their claims to be culturally more sensitive, they had the undeniable merit of being able effectively to link with local ‘Southern’ NGOs and local communities – they could reach the parts that other agencies found it hard to reach. A shift to a pro-NGO policy by major aid funders could thus easily appear to be a sensitive reaction to acknowledged project failings and a willingness to make a new start. At the same time, they could provide a new channel for the delivery of aid. Another perceived advantage was the NGOs reputation (poorly substantiated in fact, as Stewart shows in this issue) for cost-effectiveness and efficiency.

A pro-NGO policy on the part of both bilateral and multilateral aid agencies also offered an escape from much of the right wing attack on aid and intervention, particularly when negotiated with and channelled through governments and states in developing countries. The dominant neo-liberal paradigm (the ‘counter-revolution’ in development theory, of which John Toye has written) has justified vitriolic attacks on any left-learning states which take development seriously and scorn for the corruption and ‘bad governance’ of those which do not. The fact that NGOs are not governments thus becomes a positive factor in its own right – whatever their weaknesses or disadvantages, they are not the government and that is enough for some.
Another strand in the emergence of the NGOs as key actors within the development industry has been the attitude of NGOs themselves. In the second half of the 1980s, spurred on by massive public support generated by the exposure of the Ethiopian famine and by a self-belief generated by the perceived superiority of their work relative to the ‘official’ aid industry, NGOs were in an expansionist mood. They felt more than ready to campaign for and accept the greater role which the official industry was preparing to offer them – partly because they genuinely thought they could spend the increased aid flows well but also, as the 1990s progressed, because their own fund raising, upon which much expansion had been planned, was growing far slower than predicted. Their growth and expansion of funds has encouraged a massive growth of southern NGOs.

The reasons for the mushrooming of these organisations need to be examined on a case by case basis but, crudely speaking, they range from the authentic to the fraudulent. In the middle are many previous beneficiaries of aid repositioning themselves in a new market. This may apply particularly to sections of African academia and the civil service whose essentially public sector institutions have lost the ability to direct the agenda. Whether the proliferation of NGOs involving former academics and civil servants in any sense helps ‘development’ is debatable. Most of these new Southern NGOs are highly dependent on funds and other forms of support from their Northern counterparts. But the way in which the Northern NGOs themselves are ‘doing business’ is also changing, often to a striking degree, and so too is the relationship with, and demands on, their Southern ‘partners’. Wallace looks at a number of specific management tools which have come increasingly to be adopted as part of the ‘professional’ armoury of the larger NGOs and at the general management baggage that is now carried, in part as a result of the demands for accountability from those who provide the NGOs with their funds and in part as a result of the growing resemblance of these NGOs to commercial organisations. Such detail is welcome partly because it may be useful for any readers who deal with such agencies to have an update on the current jargon, but also because it is in the detail of these tools, and in understanding how they are used in combination, that their nature and their purpose becomes obvious. They are tools developed in a Northern business world to offer senior management ways to establish and monitor the central direction of an enterprise. This is how they are now being used in the aid industry, just at the time when much new management theory is recognising the need for highly decentralised decision making and for diversity in such a fast-changing world.

Good management and accountability are of course desirable for NGOs, as for any other organisation. They are however concepts which need to be carefully negotiated and defined, given the unequal ‘partnerships’ which have developed between Northern funders – government, multilateral and NGO – and the African NGOs and community based organisations (CBOs) societies through whose activities local communities are supposed, according to the NGO rhetoric, to undertake their own initiatives for sustainable development. Instead, as Wallace shows, the management tools adopted have not only come from Northern business practice but tend to operate from the ‘top down’. Not only are most of the management tools concerned with enforcing and regulating, but there is a striking absence of mechanisms to ensure that management and accountability works both ways (as in a genuine partnership) and ensures the accountability of funders and the ‘development industry’ as a whole by those involved as local (African) partners and supposed beneficiaries.

There are certainly other tools that have been developed with a far more positive and emancipatory objective in mind. Participative Rural Appraisal (PRA) is one method
which as Wallace explains has its origins in a far more ‘people centred’ approach to development. Paradoxically its widespread adoption raises new concerns. Designed as an iterative tool for local communities, it can also be used as a technique which allows ‘trained professionals’ to believe that they, even as outsiders, can understand the dynamics and needs of local communities better than local actors and their representatives. Not for nothing was the method originally known as Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) in some sections of the industry.

It is hard to escape the conclusion that the impact of the switch to a ‘closer to the people’ pro-NGO approach on local development activists is that their ideas now have to mesh with strategic plans (maybe several plans of several funders) written thousands of miles away, be designed according to non-translatable project concepts and be subject to distant and unchallengeable funding decisions by the funders of the funders. If that is not enough, their very right to define their own problem might be challenged by a stranger who once had a weekend PRA course in London or Washington! It is not coincidental that such a process, despite some rearrangements it is true, preserved the power and defined continuing roles for those who were powerful in the industry to start with. In this there is much in common with restructuring in other industries.

This may appear exaggerated. A number of individual NGOs have made great efforts to ensure that this does not happen, that the dangers inherent in the above processes are balanced by developing greater local knowledge, decentralising certain functions, employing more national staff. Indeed one point we would make is that NGOs, both national and international, should be analysed on the basis of their individual structure and record rather than bundled up into an NGO policy – for or against. It is hard however to resist an overall picture of control, decision making and room for manoeuvre slipping from Africa to institutional funders in the North often through the offices of Northern NGOs.

It is clear that the shift to a pro-NGO policy, often justified – at least by the NGOs themselves – on the grounds of getting closer to the poor, has not been accompanied by any lessening in the centralised Northern control of the industry but rather by the reverse. Northern NGOs are imposing tighter parameters on their local in-country staff and in turn are being increasingly obliged, in seeking funding for their work, to operate through often highly structured bureaucratic procedures. Once such procedures become the norm, then not only are the much vaunted flexibility and cultural appropriateness of the NGOs denied expression but they are vulnerable to strong pressure that NGOs should now recognise the desirability of competing for development contracts with other organisations, including private sector consultancy companies.

The logical extension of this is to extend the definition of NGO to include all non-governmental organisations (including private enterprises) offering ‘development’ goods and services. This is increasingly happening, in fact, both with more routine ‘development projects’ and with aspects of emergency relief programmes. It is a small step from this to recognition of the activities of companies like Executive Outcomes as described and reported by Harding as a perfectly legitimate and normal area of ‘development-related activities’. The prospect of private security companies operating freely across Africa under the approved rubric of ‘development’ underlines the timeliness of Zack-Williams’ review of the lack of progress around visions of an African high command. The continuing lack of any such officially established and approved organization leaves the space for active intervention by foreign govern-
ments, private security companies and mercenaries in any major conflict. In January, for example, it was reported that hundreds of mercenaries, led by French officers, were being recruited for a so-called White Legion to support the efforts of President Mobutu's forces to regain control in eastern Zaire (The Guardian, 8 January 1997). Recruitment was said to be in the hands of Alain Le Carro, a former police colonel who was part of Francois Mitterand's personal protection unit before retiring in 1994. As head of a small security firm, he has operated in the Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso. He is associated with Robert Montoya, another former Elysee gendarme, reportedly in Zaire on contract for Executive Outcomes (although the managing director of the Pretoria-based firm denied that they were sending mercenaries to join the so-called 'White Legion').

The fact that NGOs are not government organisations has enabled many to link them closely to the emergence of civil society, widely considered to be a good thing, particularly by those critical of the role of the state in development. Indeed, for many, NGOs become equated with civil society, and civil society with NGOs – as if there are no other institutions or organisations (trades unions, human rights movements, social movements, political parties) of any significance in promoting civil rights and human development. Paradoxically, the promotion of NGOs has been linked not only to the promotion of civil society, but also to the ‘good governance’ agenda – in which ‘good governance’ is not only concerned with reducing the powers of the state and encouraging political pluralism, but also, in effect, with de-politicising civil society and encouraging ‘good works’. NGOs have the attraction of being not only non-governmental, but also non-political.

Although no attempt is made to offer a theoretical definition of civil society both Stewart and Atampugre in this issue share a vision of it as a politically contested domain. There is nothing inherently progressive or democratic about it. In fact the emergence of civil society can be accompanied by increasing as well as decreasing levels of conflict, and even violence. The ‘opening up’ of civil society creates new opportunities, but also new constraints; and the opportunities may not be equally valuable for all within the society concerned. Stewart offers an example of how business can see civil society as legal space in which rights to the ownership (and export) of capital can be established and privileged over other perhaps more basic human rights.

Both writers see a multitude of ways in which external funding flows affect local political and social development. One of the more serious is that if certain types of local initiative receive disproportionate amounts of external support (financial and other), then the whole conception of civil society as an authentic, indigenous context for local initiatives is undermined and distorted, inevitably if not intentionally. As both writers point out, genuine elements of local accountability would offer some protection against such distortion but representative bodies for a number of reasons – not least the Northern legal constraints on the spending of aid money – are seldom the most favoured recipients of Northern funds. Also Stewart makes the crucial point, all too often overlooked or wilfully ignored, that a strong state locally can be the guarantor of a strong civil society.

Significantly, Rudebeck in his welcome revisit to Kandjadja, Guinea Bissau at the time of the 1994 elections found the popular aspirations for democracy indistinguishable from development and meaningless if the one didn't lead to the other. Stewart quotes Claude Ake's worries about the 'democratisation of disempowerment' as peoples' alienation from power and their oppression are no longer visible as problems inviting
solution. As the aid industry exerts control of ever more detail of the development agenda and intrudes more powerfully into civil society as an alternative to the state, it runs the risk of denying rather than creating access to development, and of reducing rather than increasing the prospects for democracy.

References


Happy Ever After in the Marketplace: Non-government Organisations and Uncivil Society

Sheelagh Stewart

This following declaration, about NGOs and civil society, is typical of the hallowed tones used to discuss both. This article sets out to examine what I have called the 'NGO phenomenon' which has arisen in the last decade. It is not a critique of NGOs per se, but a critique of the way in which development policy has focused on NGOs, to the extent that expectations of NGO performance are unrealistically high and exclude other options for development.

As governments absent themselves from social leadership and the power of the unaccountable increases, so civil society emerges from the bottom, hungry for global justice and radical social change. It is led by non-government groups which bypass the centre, inform themselves of the issues and appeal directly to the grassroots. They are society's new moral and social watchdogs, filling the vacuum of ideas and energy at the centre (The Guardian ['Links'], 20 November 1996).

The NGO phenomenon is significant, both financially (Fowler, 1992; Farrington and Lewis, 1993) and numerically. At the 1994 Copenhagen summit, the vice-President of the United States, Al Gore, announced that 'nearly half of the aid from ... USAID would within five years be provided to private organisations not direct to the poor world's governments' (The Economist, 18 March, p.15). It is more difficult to establish how many NGOs there are, but a number of writers have commented on a significant increase in both the developed and the less-developed world (Arossi et al. 1994; Fowler, 1992b; Livernash, 1992). In addition, NGOs have been prescribed for development ills which vary from rural development (Uphoff, 1986), to the alleviation of urban poverty (Mitlin and Satterthwaite, 1992; Thomas, 1994), and monitoring of human rights abuses (Pratt and Stone, 1995:1).

The two most cited reasons for focusing expenditure on NGOs are the qualities possessed by NGOs in their own right and what NGOs can do as part of civil society. Both of these arguments emerge from development's 'lost decade' – the eighties – and the corresponding 'impasse' or 'crisis' in development theory (Schuurman, 1996:1). Effectively this sense of failure means that the development benchmark or standard is low at the time when NGOs first make their appearance in the psyche of large development agencies. Clark (1992:3) expresses a practical argument for NGOs: that they can provide a link between 'big' development and poor people, by telling the 'big' developers where to put the development. There are three critical aspects of this argument: the first is its focus on bigness/orthodoxy/technical fix for technical problems (p.3) as the main problem. This therefore overlooks the complex nature of the relationships within which aid transactions are embedded. The second, is that it
does not necessarily seek to replace ‘big’ development, just to introduce a mechanism to focus it better. This particular apprehension of the problem leads ironically enough to another set of ‘technical fix’ solutions, that is if the problem is that the organisations are too large and not people focused, then the solution is smaller, more people-focused organisations. This overlooks the fact that large logistically sophisticated organisations are in some instances necessitated by the extent of the problem, and in other instances the problem may not be that development is not people-focused, but which people it chooses to focus on. Put differently, this perception of development failure lacks a power analysis, and therefore, as the following discussion illustrates, the solutions proposed for this failure are similarly lacking.

The third element is perhaps the most critical. This concerns the conflating of ‘anti-bigness’ arguments with anti-statist arguments and is linked back with the loss of the socialist paradigm as the link between theory and development praxis (Schuurman, 1996:1), and the concurrent increasing popularity of neo-liberal ideology. Fowler and James (1995:15) make the anti-government position clear:

*For government the primary relationship with beneficiaries is one of control, while for NGOs it is one of voluntarism. Governments cannot avoid relating to its (sic) citizenry both as policeman and promotor.*

The overlap between this and neo-liberal orthodoxy – that ‘less government is better government’ is obvious. The state is presented as a monolithic dysfunctional whole (Clark, 1992:59). If the state is wholly bad, there is only one alternative and it is private – either private development organisations (NGOs), or the market. This contributes to a very specific definition of NGOs as something to be funded as an alternative to governments or states and furthermore worthy of being funded because of what they are not (government), rather than because of what they are (Beckman, 1993; Meyer, 1992 a,b). The literature on NGOs can be broadly divided into two categories: a ‘pro-NGO’ perspective and an ‘NGO-critical’ perspective.

**The pro-NGO Perspective (or NGOs do it cheaper, better, faster)**

The best known proponents of this perspective are Brown and Korten (1989), Clark (1992), (Edwards and Hulme, 1992), Fowler (1992a; 1992b), Howes (1992) Carroll (1992) and Uphoff (1986). The writers in this category set their theorising about NGOs in the context of the ‘crisis’ of development thinking. NGOs are prescribed for development ills because their organisational characteristics – participatory, innovative, low in bureaucracy, flexible, cheap and able to benefit the poorest of the poor (Fowler, 1992a; 1992b). These organisational characteristics include, ‘comparative advantage’, a term borrowed from economics discourse which in the context of NGOs broadly indicates that NGOs are better at doing ‘it’ – development – than other organisations, for example ‘commercial enterprise and government’ (Fowler and James, 1995:15). Unlike its economic counterpart, the notion of NGO ‘comparative advantage’ is vague in the extreme, and impossible to measure. This notwithstanding, the idea of comparative advantage is frequently cited by ‘donors’ as a reason for funding NGOs (Stewart, 1997).

There is a fundamental problem with the notion of comparative advantage and therefore with the notion that NGOs can have an extensive developmental impact. The elements which combine to create comparative advantage are organisational traits typical of small organisations, whilst developmental problems are vast. Vast problems require either vast logistically sophisticated organisations or vastly well co-
ordained groups of smaller organisations. This fundamental problem is dealt with in three ways in the pro-NGO literature.

**Broadly Positive Claims vs. Specifically Critical Case Studies**

First, the extremely positive view of the role of NGOs in development is largely comprised of a broadly positive general argument which uses case study material anecdotally where it supports the points being made (Carroll, 1992; Clark, 1992; Edwards and Hulme, 1992). Balanced against this, however, is a body of case study literature which systematically tests assumptions about NGOs (Tendler, 1982; DGIS/NOVIB, 1988, 1990 and 1993; Muir, 1991; Robinson, 1992; Vivian and Maseko, 1994; Uphoff, 1987; Farrington et al. 1993). Many of the case studies contradict the pro-NGO claims made by the theoretical literature. If the pro-NGO camp relies almost exclusively on broad theoretical overviews of NGOs and/or civil society, until recently, the NGO-critical perspective was comprised mainly of case studies indicating poor NGO performance. It is possible to argue that, because of typical case-study limitations (e.g. small sample size or geographical specificity), these case studies are not generalisable. There is an intriguing question in here for development practitioners and academics – the question of what weight is attached to which pieces of work and why. Why is it that a general text which has no particular referent in the real world, but draws selectively from many to illustrate points, carries more weight than a case study which is located firmly in reality. This weighting has contributed to the current pre-eminence of NGOs in the development debate.

**The Internal Management Perspective on NGO Performance Problems**

The roots of this perspective lie in the organisational development (OD) literature that has largely been applied to the private sector in developed countries. This writing is then applied to NGOs without challenging its basic tenets or questioning how they might apply to the context in question. The focus on internal management allocates responsibility for NGOs failure to meet expectations, to internal management problems, rather than to the immensity of the problems of underdevelopment, or to the unreality of the expectations about NGO performance. David Brown and Covey (1988) for example argue that NGOs are unique because they are ‘value’ not profit based and therefore pose specific management problems. If, however, the OD paradigm is expanded to accommodate the particularity of NGOs, then they see no problem in fixing the site of NGO performance problems within the NGOs themselves. They do not question the relevance of the OD paradigm to NGOs, nor do they argue that in considering NGOs some form of wider (perhaps political) contextualisation is necessary. These and other writing on topics such as the group dynamics necessary for community development interventions (Butcher, 1980), capacity building (Sahley, 1995), and NGO management, have contributed to the creation of a school of ‘NGO management science’, which focuses only on the internal problems of NGOs. Context related problems such as the effect of external funding on the accountability of the organisation, are ignored.

**Scaling-up**

The positive characteristics ascribed to NGOs are the characteristics of small organisations – flexibility, lack of bureaucracy and closeness to the target group to name three. Small organisations may intervene extremely effectively in their own constituencies, but it is clear that they cannot meet the challenge of enormous underdevelopment. Hence, scaling-up – a theory which sets out to show that small
organisations by growing themselves in a number of different ways – which vary from ordinary getting bigger, to expanding their influence through lobbying can deal with large-scale developmental problems whilst retaining their small organisation charms (Howes and Sattar, 1992). The Holy Grail of scaling-up, however, is multiplicative strategies, where one unit of increase brings more than a proportional return; for example, organisations which can be turned over to clients thereby freeing resources for starting similar initiatives elsewhere, or collaborative provision of services with government agencies. What is important about this is that it does not necessarily rule out a role for government agencies in service provision. Effectively therefore though scaling-up appears to deal with the anomaly in the literature, one of the ways in which it does this is by proposing links with government, not by suggesting that NGOs through scaling-up can replace government functions. This contradicts Fowler and James (1995:6) assertion that NGOs ‘fill the gaps caused by decreasing government service provision’. Finally, there is little evidence that small NGOs when they grow large retain their small organisation characteristics. Research indicates that as their size increases, NGOs experience all the difficulties associated with large organisations, for example cumbersome bureaucracy and inflexibility (Brown and Covey, 1987:21). A further problem is that, as NGOs grow larger, their need for funding increases and this creates organisational schizophrenia, with fundraisers focusing on their constituency (donors), whilst field staff focus on theirs, the target group (Brown and Covey, 1987:22). Finally, smallness is either an advantage or it is not and it seems odd to suggest in one breath that smallness is a Good Thing, and in the next that NGOs should get bigger.

The NGO-critical Perspective

Once again there are two distinct strands in this critical literature: a ‘pragmatic’ strand which draws attention to the problems implicit in the privileging of NGOs above all other development strategies and a political strand, which draws attention to the agendas implicit in the privileges of NGOs, and sketches in their political context.

The Pragmatic Strand

The pragmatic strand in the literature is principally concerned with ‘what works’. It therefore criticizes approaches which are ineffective, emphasizing two problem areas: the inadequacy of donors as agents to promote effective NGOs, and the inadequacy of existing criteria in defining an ‘effective’ NGO and therefore in replicating effective NGOs in different conditions. In addition, the pragmatic line makes the political point that NGOs do not operate in isolation, they are part of a system and are therefore affected by the way in which other parts of the system (i.e. ‘donors’), operate.

The Political Strand

The political strand of the broadly ‘anti-NGO’ literature can be situated on a continuum. At one end are discussions of ‘pragmatic’ issues, for example of the inadequacy of ‘donor’ agencies in promoting local organisations (Meyer, 1992:11); at the other, overtly political arguments dealing with issues of relative power within the aid system and suggesting that ‘donors’, NGOs and NGO constituencies may all have different agendas and priorities (van Ufford, Krujlt and Downing, 1988; van Ufford, 1988; Diallo, 1991; Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 1992).

The critical aspect of Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith’s argument is its acknowledgement that power relations and access to resources affect NGO performance, and more
particularly affect what NGOs choose to prioritise. The word ‘power’ is startlingly absent from most discussions of NGOs. This is a dangerous omission, rendered more dangerous by the idealistic, wistful and ‘nice’ tone of the broad theoretical literature referred to earlier. It is absent, largely because of the polarised form that the discussion has taken. The essence of the polarisation is in the neo-liberal belief that government is bad and that therefore, non-government is good. This is a simplistic notion on which to base development policy and practice, and only a power analysis will restore the subtlety necessary for the development of good practice.

If the privileging of NGOs per se lacks debate about the ‘exchange of resources ... where economic and political relations combine to create varying patterns of power and incentive’ (Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith, 1992:1397), then what of the second argument for funding NGOs – that they are a critical part of civil society and that civil society itself has an important role to play in the establishment and maintenance of democracy? To answer this question three other questions have to be answered. They are: what is civil society; what are the development policy arguments for a focus on civil society? what is the relationship between NGOs and civil society?

What is Civil Society?

There are numerous debates about the nature of civil society, and it is easy to become caught up in the complexity of these debates. For the purposes of this article, therefore, I will use Hadenius and Uggla's (1996) definition:

A common way of clarifying the concept of civil society is to say that it denotes (a) a certain area of society which is (b) dominated by interaction of a certain kind. The area in question is the public space between the state and the individual citizen (or household). Civil society is further distinguished by the fact that the activities contained therein take an organised and collective form. When we speak of civil society, it is to groups arranged in social networks of a reasonable fixed and routinised character that we refer.

This definition seems relatively straightforward, but one of the most serious problems with the use of civil society as a concept or analytical construct is that it has been ‘over theorised’, to the point where its usefulness is questionable (Fierlbeck, 1996). In the current (by which I mean post-cold war) debate civil society has been used by many different writers to encapsulate a vast number of differing ideas, whose only linking thread is an element of ‘wishful thinking’ a desire for some pleasant organising principle beyond the home (and within it if one includes feminists). Fierlbeck describes the concept of civil society as a political ideal as ‘both descriptively brave and politically feckless’ and its use as an analytical instrument as pointless (Fierlbeck, 1996:13).

There seems little point in adding to this debate my theory of civil society, so I will use Hadenius and Uggla's definition and confine myself to commenting on the ways in which the word has been used in justifying development policy intervention. If the concept has been overtheorised why have development theorists engaged in discussions about the role of civil society? Moyo captures the mood if not the reason for this 'renewed scholarly interest in the impact of state-society relations in the third world' (1993:2).

The state has failed and to a great and perhaps even a decisive extent, the possibility of sustainable democracy in countries emerging from authoritarian rule or ethnic conflict will depend upon whether civil society will reassert its political role (Ibid., p. 1).
It is worth dwelling for a time on this statement, because it reveals a number of aspects of the civil society debate. It combines requiem and hymn in equal measure, regret for a lost golden age of civil society, with hope for a golden future where civil society comes into its own again. This is ironic, particularly in the context of Zimbabwe (about which Moyo is writing), where there has always been a strong civil society whose impact has been anything but democratic, largely because it has historically been dominated by organisations seeking to promote the interests of the white minority. Herbst, commenting on the erstwhile Rhodesia National Farmers Union, now the Commercial Farmers Union (CFU) that,

_The white farmers are ... powerful because they are well organised. Their status as the most powerful and sophisticated grouping in Rhodesia, can be traced back to 1942. To this day the CFU may be the only Farmers Union in the world that has a government enforced closed shop. This allows the white farmers to undertake research and lobbying exercises of enormous sophistication and expense_ (1990:47).

This history notwithstanding, civil society is eulogised as the ultimate medicinal compound, capable of curing ills from ethnic conflict to authoritarian regimes. This overlooks the possibility that only the state that is powerful enough to contain the contestation of specific group interests.

Hitching the civil society wagon to the democracy star in this way places both ideas beyond question or criticism. Diamond’s statement that ‘a vibrant associational life’ is one of the most significant forces for democracy (1988:23), is typical of the uncritical way in which the concept is invoked. This article attempts to provide some balance by critiquing the way in which civil society is used in development discourse.

**What are the Development Policy Arguments for a Focus on Civil Society?**

The first step is to examine the context of the civil society argument. There are two aspects to the context: the academic or intellectual context and the policy context.

*The Intellectual Context:* I have already referred to what Schuurman refers to as the ‘impasse’ (p.2) in development thinking and linked with this a sense of failure in development circles. The ‘state’ has been located as the cause of this failure by thinking from all sides of the political spectrum. The left is disillusioned with the performance (or non-performance) of the central state, social democrats are in retreat from their own statist experiences, whilst neo-liberals claim that good government is less government (see p. 4). What this means effectively is that both ‘radicals’ who view development ‘as an inherently unequal process involving the continued exploitation of peripheral societies’ and neo-liberals who believe that if the market functions effectively wealth will gradually trickle down to the poorest and ease if not eradicate underdevelopment, want less government and more non-government/private institutions.

*The Policy Context:* Much of the disillusion with the state in the policy context can be traced to the functioning of development funding in Africa. The erstwhile belief (espoused by both African leaders and development policy makers) was that only the state was capable of containing competing ethnic claims and galvanising the development process. However, an ‘unpalatable paradox’ (Fierlbeck, 1996:4) became apparent as leaders of some African states showed themselves more than willing to use the resources at their disposal to line their own pockets (Ibid., p.4).
Disillusionment with the state across the political spectrum, is fertile soil for the argument in favour of civil society. The argument begins by linking civil society and democracy. Why are they linked? Because any strengthening of civil society weakens the state (Booth, 1987:24); a strong civil society can make government services more accountable (SEADD, 1994:1); and conscious intervention within civil society will shape internal political processes (Fowler, 1993:24). This logic is wrong for a number of reasons:

- It dichotomizes the state and civil society;
- It overlooks the fact that different players may mean different things by strengthening civil society;
- Strengthening civil society is about strengthening not weakening the state—the role of the rule of law;
- It misses the question of who can participate in civil society rather than who does;
- It misses the limitations within which official aid agencies and national NGOs work;
- Assumes that the state is always the villain of the piece and overlooks the role of the market;
- It fails to differentiate between the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Each of these problems will be considered in turn.

**It Dichotomizes the State and Civil Society**

The statement 'any strengthening of civil society weakens the state' presupposes two mutually exclusive, constantly competing entities. The strength of one defines the weakness of the other. This is a simplistic argument and ignores the nature of power within society. Groups within civil society may be allied with the state, or opposed to it, or both at different times. They may also be co-opted by the state. The state itself is not necessarily always the villain of the piece. Organisations within civil society which represent the market may lobby the state to introduce legislation which affects other civil society interests negatively. Gaidzanwa (1993), writing about Zimbabwe, comments on how formal trade interests worked hand in hand with government to prevent informal traders from undercutting a lucrative market in office machinery.

The space where the state, market and civil society operate is characterised by crosscutting, shifting and blurred alliances, few of which benefit the disempowered. Fatton refers to 'a complex concatenation of the sites of ruling class formation, class disarticulation and subordinate class resistance that crosscut both the state and civil society' (1993:29). To assume that the state and civil society are always in opposition is to ignore power relationships and how they function across both civil society and the state. A function of power is access and it is likely that powerful citizens are in a position to influence both civil society and the state. Fierlbeck comments that the dichotomization of the state from civil society is based on an assumption that '... all things political belong in the formal sphere, with the latter remaining an environment of cooperation and good will'. This view is naïve. Fierlbeck goes on and it is worth finishing this section by quoting her at length:
Surely one of the most profound victories of feminist theory in recent decades has been the acceptance of a much broader definition of 'power' than that practised by formal political groups. Power is no longer seen as the ability of A to make B do or abstain from an activity but also less tangibly, the ability to define the political agenda or the ability to shape others interests with their approval and support ... By making a distinction between 'political' and 'civil' society, we must either accept that the groups comprising civil society are not affected by the exercise of power (a conclusion manifestly unpalatable to those concerned with the politics of race class and gender); or we must grant that the politics that do inform these civil associations are simply less important than the 'formal' power relations in political society (a suggestion that is probably equally unacceptable to those concerned with the politics of difference) (Fierlbeck, 1996:8).

By extension, a power analysis involves analysing in a given context who has power, how it is brokered and most critically, who has access to 'donors'. The dichotomization of state and civil society indicates an absence of a power analysis and therefore the absence of knowledge about how power is brokered. One of the stated objectives of governance policy is to prevent arbitrary abuse of power. It seems logical that this policy objective requires an understanding of power relations, nevertheless these considerations and a consideration of how 'donors' are wired into the power grid are absent.

**It Overlooks the Fact that Different Players Mean Different Things by Strengthening Civil Society**

Strengthening civil society is a central plank of good governance policy. What does this mean? Robinson comments that:

> [T]he expectation is that direct support to civic organisations can help to broaden citizen participation in public policy formulation, increase the scope for holding governments accountable for the management of public resources and limit the arbitrary exercise of power by upholding civil and political liberties (Robinson, 1996:1).

By extension a strong civil society would be one in which all of these factors were present. Therefore strengthening civil society in Robinson's terms would imply working towards an ideal of broader citizen participation with its corollary limiting of government maladministration. He goes on to mention the 'current donor preoccupation with the associational sphere ... reflects broader policy concerns about a diminished role for the state'. These 'broader policy concerns', are summed up by *The Economist* (22 July 1996) which comments that the World Bank's first job is to,

> ensure that poor countries are a welcoming place in which to do business. This ... means prodding governments into reforming their regulatory systems, cleaning up their banking systems and improving their judiciaries.

There may be a broad confluence of opinion about the utility of civil society in easing current development problems but there is clearly little agreement (Fierlbeck, 1996) on what this role implies. Civil society can be construed as the embodiment of and protection for both commercial and civil liberties. In the classic (18th century) liberal sense, civil society is comprised of associations formed to protect commercial interests from intervention by the state – at the time – the monarchy. The more modern conception described in *The Economist* is likewise concerned with protecting commercial interests from state intervention. Protection of commercial interests requires the roll back of the state in particular areas; reforming means reducing the
number of rules and controls on external business interests. This may include abolishing social welfare measures such as food subsidies and free health care and labour legislation such as minimum wages and maximum working hours. These measures often do result in a weakening of the state, not least because deregulation and structural adjustment impose harsh economic strictures on citizens which makes state governments unpopular. In consequence, the coercive powers of such governments are seldom weakened. Instead they may be used to quell dissent – for example labour disputes, triggered by unpopular market reforms. It is weak states which exercise power arbitrarily, lack legitimacy and have unaccountable unreliable bureaucracy and maladministration. The imposition of adjustment packages may contribute to the arbitrary abuse of the state’s power by weakening its ability to provide basic protections for its citizens – eroding its legitimacy while at the same time easing the path for external business interests. It is possible to envisage an extreme situation where external business interests oiled by money earmarked for good government operate in a rarefied atmosphere of efficient bureaucracy, currency mobility and protection of property, whilst citizens face the ravages of a weak, predatory and corrupt state.

Zimbabwe is rapidly going down this path. The rights of citizens are being eroded, whilst the rights of residents are strengthened. Residents are largely free of cumbersome immigration and customs regulations, can easily access hard currency, and enjoy more freedom of movement than citizens. Citizens who leave the country for more than seven years run the risk of losing their citizenship. A further interesting example is that of land. After the expiry of the Lancaster House Agreement in 1990, the government declared all land subject to compulsory purchase for the purpose of resettling the landless. This policy was directly responsible for the party’s re-election in the 1995 elections and it is unlikely that ZANU-PF could maintain power if this policy were to be reversed. However, this is exactly the type of regulation and threat to ownership rights which market based reforms seek to abolish. A proposed constitutional amendment which seeks to provide a workable compromise was announced in The Herald (20 December 1995). This gives ‘foreign investors constitutional protection for their property should it fall under an international or bilateral agreement’ (p.11). The ‘international and bilateral’ agreements are not specified, but presumably they are the same agreements under which aid is agreed and donated. This highlights both the true nature of structural adjustment – market-based reforms for the benefit of foreign markets and the relationship between (foreign) trade and aid.

In doing its job – making the environment more welcoming for business – such a state is accountable, but only to business interests. It is possible then that a strong civil society which will encourage greater citizen participation depends on a strong state, especially one that enjoys the confidence of its citizens. In other words, that democracy is a necessary condition for civil society, not the reverse. Chabal (1992:85) comments that ‘... when the legitimacy of the state is reduced or disintegrates, the realm of legitimate political action narrows and eventually withers. The voice of civil society is then often officially silenced even if it continues to be heard’. This implies that far from depending on a weak state, civil society is only strong in the context of a strong (legitimate) state. Perhaps strengthening civil society is about strengthening not reducing the state?

Advocates of adjustment espouse a trickle down theory of both wealth and civil society. If laws protecting business are improved, then ultimately, better laws will apparently trickle down into other areas of concern, for example, human rights and
social welfare. To understand why this will not work it is necessary to understand two related factors. First, successful adjustment often involves removing many of the laws and safeguards which protect human rights and social welfare (Ignatieff, 1995:62). Second, there are two distinctively different concepts of liberty behind the apparent confluence of opinion. The ‘liberty which is the sine qua non of market society is passive liberty; the right to enjoy and accumulate property’; the other is the ‘active liberty valued in the civic paradigm – the freedom to make the laws one lives by, to participate in the making and the ordering of the polity’ (Ignatieff, 1995: 61). In short, the neo-liberal dream is ‘freedom from’ intervention by the state; the democrats dream is the citizens' ‘freedom to’ participate with accompanying freedom to associate, freedom of the press, and freedom of speech. None of these freedoms are particularly important to the profitable conduct of business. The freedom to participate requires a different state from the freedom from intervention in commerce, and the conflation of the two in development theory is problematic.

the neo-liberal trajectory denies the policy tools to intercede actively in favour of those without jobs, houses, health care, schooling and food. Instead national assets are sold on a large scale to (inter)national private capital, leading to a recolonisation of the third world (Schuurman, 1996:12).

Strengthening Civil Society is about Strengthening, not Weakening, the State

Many post-colonial African countries have ‘dual’ systems of government, that is they have the form of democracy — parliament, voting, constitutions and sets of laws but these systems are subordinate to and in many instances augment systems of patronage and clan-based politics. Okoth-Ogendo discusses why clan based structures are so prevalent in post-colonial Africa and suggests that colonial states in the terminal phase of colonialism deliberately created:

a highly fractionalised political culture; one which sought to institutionalise conflicts and to strengthen centrifugal forces rather than to nurture and cement national unity. More often than not, those conflicts and forces were organised around ancient claims, accrued rights, future demands, or matters that were particularly sensitive to race, religion, economy and even geography, hence they were essentially divisive in character (1991:8).

In essence as the colonial state grew weaker it relied on power imbalances to maintain its position. He goes on to comment that post-colonial African states are democratic, 'in the western liberal sense'. The forms of democracy constructed by the colonial state – laws, legal systems, judiciaries, and 'civil society' are present. Nevertheless, form does not equal substance and these institutions operate as mechanisms for the entrenchment of interests which have 'accrued by reason of the exploitative nature of the colonial process itself' (1991:10). When there are pre-existing power imbalances as there were in colonial states, then democratic forms merely reinforce existing patterns of accumulation and exploitation. There are two related reasons for this: the role of the rule of law and the relationship between democratic forms and democratic norms.

The Role of the Rule of Law

What is absent from both the desire to increase citizen participation and the desire to make poor countries a welcoming place in which to do business is an understanding of the role of the rule of law. In other words, because theorists are moving from what
they ‘know’ and see around them, a critical aspect of what makes it ‘work’ is invisible. Legally constituted groups in societies where the rule of law pertains may well take a public role in which they lobby for greater citizen participation, hold governments to account and push for less state intervention in the commercial realm. Many governments which face this situation may regret the status of such groups and may fight long and hard to ignore them or reduce their role, but they have to do this within a legal framework, they cannot merely ‘terminate’ the players and ‘squelch’ the organisations. The ideal is that there is some sort of balance between civil society, the state and the market which contains in something resembling equilibrium the constant struggle for advantage.

Laws and legal systems do not equal the rule of law. The rule of law is present in a system within which law operates bureaucratically in the positive sense of the word, that is consistently regardless of the government at the time. This is juxtaposed against a system where:

> since illegality is defined by the state, it can be defined in ways that serve the interests of the politically powerful; the boundary between legal and illegal shifts over time and is susceptible to pressures that are political (MacGaffey, 1992:247).

In this type of context, a constitution may facilitate the exercise of state power rather than limit it, thus providing no protection for actors in the civil society arena. Civil society organisations in this type of system walk a fine line between legality and illegality. Funding them in the hope that they will oppose the state, and promote citizens’ rights and participation is therefore likely to be in vain. Conversely, it is forces within extra-legal civil society, that is organisations in the space declared illegal by the state, that are most likely to be able to force the government to change through various forms of resistance and conflict. Most significant battles for the rights of the oppressed are fought to some extent within extra-legal space. The militant suffragettes who contributed to winning the vote for women were often outside the law – they had no voice and therefore could not fight legally. Their battle is at one and the same time a battle in civil society and a battle for space to fight further battles legally rather than extra-legally. The termination of apartheid in South Africa owes much to internal struggles fought in extra-legal space by banned organisations and banned individuals. Seidman comments that ‘only a strong civil society capable if necessary of mass political action in the streets can finally thwart officials who have taken the bit in their teeth (1994:189). Strengthening civil society in this context may imply aiding extra-legal, but legitimate organisations. However, this type of engagement with the state is often underground, may be violent, is certainly repressed violently and is often a zero-sum game. One of the many things that is said about civil society is that it can bolster the rule of law. In essence, this is putting the cart before the horse: the rule of law bolsters a free and vibrant civil society not the converse. If we return to the concept of space, where civil society exists bolstered by the rule of law, the struggle will always be to widen its influence. Chabal’s comment on the state in Africa, describes the opposite situation:

> The state in Africa defines the boundaries of political legitimacy so that the political actions of civil society are almost inevitably confined to the realm of political illegitimacy (Chabal, 1992:85).

A weak state, by definition, is one which decreases legitimate space and requires ever-increasing force, coercion and divide and rule to maintain its power. Therefore in a
weak state, if there is a civil society, it is unlikely to pose any threat to the existing
government. By the same token it is in the realm of political illegitimacy or extra-legal
space, where movements powerful enough to contain the excesses of the state may be
found.

**Democratic Forms do not Equal Democracy**

It seems trite to state that the presence of democratic forms is a necessary, but not
sufficient condition for democracy, but in fact much governance policy is explicitly
based on a belief that adding civil society, elections, or laws in a given context is
equivalent to democratisation (see section on the policy context above). The majority
of ‘donors’ interviewed in Stewart's study (1997), indicated that a strong civil society
was important for democratisation. When questioned about what they meant by
‘strong’ they indicated that in practice this meant funding larger numbers of NGOs
and increasing funding to the NGO sector as a whole. As the discussion on the role of
law illustrates, forms follow norms and democratic forms only acquire democratic
resonance in a democracy. When superimposed on pre-existing patterns of
exploitation, it is those patterns that are reflected in the forms.

Furthermore, the addition of democratic forms may result in a triumph of form over
norm; as long as there are democratic forms, then the normative abuse of power can
be overlooked by ‘donor’ governments. Funding provides an incentive for providing
democratic window dressing. In discussing the ‘deeply flawed’ election in the
Gambia, *The Economist* comments that Jammeh, the ex-military leader, ‘grasped the
reality of the West's new approach to Africa. If you want aid you have to have an
election, right?’ But how genuine an election? As a western diplomat in the region
delicately puts it, ‘our standards have slipped’ (*The Economist*, 21 September 1996).
Ake calls this a ‘democratisation of disempowerment’ and comments:

> The democratisation of Africa appears to have been largely a matter of form rather than
> content. But the ascendancy of form over content results in a significant blockage to
democratisation. For the people of Africa, instead of emancipating them, democratisation is
becoming a legitimisation of their disempowerment. They are effectively worse off than they
were before democratisation for their alienation from power and their oppression are no

This is perhaps the most serious problem with expenditure on governance – that by
paying for forms of democracy, amongst them large numbers of NGOs, it obscures
the alienation of the majority of citizens from power.

There is also evidence that an increased number of NGOs may have had a negative
effect on the wider context. Hirschmann (1993), in his discussion about structural
adjustment related civil service reform in Malawi, draws attention to the ‘rise of semi-
autonomous institutions’ – NGOs. He attributes this rise to the availability of ‘donor’
funding for such institutions. The stated objective of donor policy is to strengthen
local capacity. ‘Donors’ fail, however, to distinguish between ‘capacity’ to run
organisations, which is very specific and involves a combination of education,
speaking donor-language (both literally and metaphorically) and management
ability and capacity generally. The newly created NGOs end up drawing staff from
government or the university, who can run organisations, because they offer vastly
superior salary packages. The net effect of the creation of NGOs is therefore the
weakening of the public sector.
Wilson, discussing a similar phenomenon which he calls ‘capacity shuffling’ (1993: 489) in Kenya, makes the point that NGO ‘capacity’ is a function of the people working in NGOs, and that this in turn is influenced by long term historical issues such as education, and that as a result there is a small fixed pool of people who qualify as ‘capacity’ in donor terms. He comments that ‘donors should be aware that they are transporting a fixed amount of [human] resources around the system, not adding any new ones ...’ (Wilson, 1993:489). Cliff (1993) talking about NGOs working in the area of health in Mozambique, draws attention to a completely different set of problems. She argues that public sector health services have the capacity to take a long term view and have fewer overlaps, gaps and contradictions within the system. Conversely, a number of different NGOs providing health will, almost by definition have overlaps and gaps. In addition, funding for NGOs is short term, and usually granted for discrete projects in a context where the most effective way of working is not through innovation, but through repetitive process and practice. The substitution of decentralised NGOs for a centralised public health planning system can only be cheaper at the expense of public health.

It Misses the Question of Who can Participate in Civil Society Rather Than Who Does

Held comments that ‘the question of who can participate and at what level is as old as the ancient world itself’ (1991:20). Ignatieff (1995:63) comments that the,

essential tensions between conceptions of men (sic) as civil actors or as economic ones reerupt again and again within our tradition...The neoconservative revolution...has been above all an attack on citizenship as a co-ercive bargain: citizenship is seen as a commitment to others which does not give ‘value for money’; in place of civic relations between strangers, it is proposed to substitute market relations because these enable a person not only to choose the extent and degree of his commitment to others but also to put a price on this commitment relative to other expenditures of time and money.

The corollary to this is that anyone who is not a player in the market gets nothing. Within development theory there is an assumption that the adding of a slice of civil society will ‘broaden citizen participation’ (Robinson, 1996:1). This is questionable. Civil society as envisaged by aid agencies is a space between the state and the individual in which individuals can bond together to influence the state (Fowler and James, 1995:6). Individuals play a role in the public polity as citizens, so the whole question of citizenship is critical. Broadly speaking, the legal conception of citizenship is that it is a bundle of rights and duties. The duties consist of paying taxes and obeying the law – the rights generally are what we know as human rights – rights to freedom of movement, association, and the right to participate in the polity. The first problem which has already been alluded to is the absence of a consistent bureaucracy which bases citizenship on a consistent set of rules. The second problem is that because the state defines legality it can declare that sections of the populace are not citizens, thereby effectively barring them not only from participating in civil society but from their land and livelihoods as well.

The final problem is that of second class citizenship. Even where formal citizenship has been extended to all groups within society, ‘some groups still find themselves being treated as second class citizens’ (Young, 1995:176). This is because ‘economic life is not sufficiently under the control of citizens to affect the unequal status and treatment of groups’ (Ibid.). One of the arguments in favour of NGOs both per se and
as part of civil society is that they have a close relationship to their intended beneficiaries or ‘stakeholders’ which facilitates participation. This argument needs to be unravelled. The first stage of the unravelling is the question participation in what? Participation in the NGO alone may carry social or economic benefits, but the type and extent of the benefit are the significant factors in a consideration of civil society, not participation per se. For example, is the economic benefit derived significant enough to grant citizens a degree of control over their economic life? Here, considering the trade union model may be instructive. In essence, a trade union offers its members an organisation which can in certain circumstances significantly shift the balance of power between the employer and the employee. Trade unions may also form the building blocks for larger political organisations in both legal and extra-legal space. If participation in a trade union did not confer specific and tangible benefits, membership dues would not be paid and unions would cease to exist. There is a direct link between participation and survival which means that trade unions have to respond to their members priorities. Conversey, NGOs, who rely on external sources for the bulk of their funding, do not have to respond to their members in order to survive. This makes the need for clarity about the benefits of participation critical. To discuss participation in an NGO as if it was an end in itself, is meaningless without some explanation of what is achieved through participation. In the context of civil society, participation in an NGO is meaningful only if it is linked in some way with ensuring good governance or democracy.

The second stage in the unravelling is to ask what is meant by ‘stakeholders’. Stakeholders in the context of NGOs is used synonymously with ‘beneficiaries’. This obscures a number of other significant stakeholders all of whom depend on the ‘aid’ industry for their survival: donors, NGO staff, groups of consultants and researchers. The increased resources flowing to and through NGOs, have increased the stakes, not only for beneficiaries, but also for these other stakeholders. Wilson (1993), Hirschmann (1993) and Cliff (1993), make the point that ‘donor’ funded organisations pay salaries which are vastly superior to those payed by local governments of less developed countries (LDCs). If ‘stakeholders’ are not disaggregated, the power relations between them remain invisible and the repetition of institutionalised power structures (for example, caste, and race) within NGOs is obscured. It is these institutionalised power structures that determine economic and social positioning and therefore second class citizenship. Ensuring groups, which by virtue of religion, ethnicity and gender enjoy second class citizenship or are deprived of their citizenship altogether, a place in the polity requires specific policy interventions hardly envisaged in the general belief that the existence of civil society will increase participation. In an article entitled ‘Behind the Zairean Shambles’, The Economist (2-8 November 1996), attributes the current crisis to the declaration that Tutsis who have been in Zaire for 200 years are not Zairean citizens. No one would suggest that participating in NGOs is likely to solve the problems of an intransigent Zairean state.

It misses the constraints under which official aid agencies and international NGOs work

This is the realm where aid agencies and northern NGOs hands are perhaps most tied. The rules of the agencies and northern NGOs who intend to engage with and strengthen civil society, are worth considering briefly. These rules are of three basic types: forbidding support to political activities; forbidding support which will infringe the national sovereignty of another country; and forbidding support to organisations which are not legally constituted in their own countries.
The first two are matters beyond the scope of this article (but see Bartelson, 1994) because they are extensive debates in their own right. The third is more significant in considering the question of civil society. There are two issues which are important. The first is that registration as a charity or NGO depends on interacting with a government to which the organisation in question may pose a threat and about which one of the complaints is that its bureaucracy exercises power arbitrarily and inconsistently. The department in charge of registration might arbitrarily refuse to register organisations which pose a threat, or as in pre-independent South Africa, ban registered organisations which have proved to be a threat. The second is that the bureaucracy may not function well, delaying registration, sometimes for years. The critical point is that the existence of a bureaucracy implies consistent functioning. The reality, which is often opaque to those unfamiliar with local politics, is that bureaucracies, where the rule of law does not function, tend to institutionalise power relations within society.

It assumes that the state is always the villain of the piece and overlooks the role of the market

I have already made a number of references to the predatory nature of the weak, rather than the strong state. This runs counter to the accepted theory of the state in much development theory, where it is a strong state with a 'suffocating grip' (Beckman, 1993:20), that needs to be rolled back. This is generally discussed as a removal of controls and government intervention, particularly in the economy, and the move towards a more 'open economy'. These terms are used without question. Skalnes (1995:120) comments that:

*Much rhetoric has centred on rolling back the state. But this rhetoric conceals that many of the policies pursued under the name of structural adjustment imply a changed rather than a reduced role for government ... an open economy is defined by the overall neutrality of incentives for domestic and export production, rather than by the scale of state intervention or the relative importance of private versus government owned companies (author's emphasis).*

He goes on to say that the adjustment envisaged by the World Bank requires changing a large number of policies and that this implies a 'strong' rather than weak role for government and an alteration rather than a removal of state intervention. 'Rolling back' the state is not simply rhetoric, however. The reduction of subsidies of various kinds and the encouragement of private trading are prominent aspects of structural adjustment; they entail certain restrictions on the form of state intervention (Skalnes, 1995).

This type of selective roll back of the state in the area of social welfare and labour legislation, increases the relative power within society of the market and does not necessarily decrease the coercive power of the state. In the classical liberal conception, civil society comprised interest groups which restricted state intervention in the activities of the new merchant class. This merchant class is no longer new, and nor does it invariably need to be protected from government. If anything, nation states may need to be protected from the overweening power of global markets and transnational corporations. If power is indeed shared between three principal groups, the market, the state and the citizenry, each of which can penetrate the space between – civil society (which may be both legal and extra-legal) – then the question of who penetrates this space and how becomes critical. If it is assumed that the state is always the problem, then if the problem lies elsewhere – for example market forces that are
too strong, this will be invisible. Linked with this is the invisibility of the problems caused by extra-national penetration of civil society space both in the form of initiatives to strengthen civil society and transnational business interests. What is clear is that the citizenry, unless they are also powerful in the market or exceptionally well-organised, are possibly the weakest parties in the power game.

What is the Relationship Between NGOs and Civil Society?
Robinson comments that a dichotomous view of the state and society in which ‘civil society embodies all that is good and desirable in associational life ... is prevalent in the donor community and informs strategic decisions on aid allocations and recipient organisations’ (Robinson, 1996:3). If carried to its logical conclusion, this means that it does not really matter what you fund, as long as it's part of civil society, or as long as it’s not the state. This is where NGOs are relevant. For a number of reasons, NGOs tend to be the most obvious (to ‘donors’) manifestations of civil society in less developed countries. This is because of the arguments advanced in favour of NGOs as development actors (discussed earlier). The most fundamental reasons, however, are broadly linked by a concept of ‘fit’. As the arguments in favour of NGOs have gained currency (both literal and figurative) they have become a familiar part of the development landscape. NGOs in less developed countries are the closest approximation to a European or North American idea of voluntary sector or civil society organisations. In many instances, this is a case of familiar organisational form, that is a board of trustees, mission, a constitution and some sort of legal registration — usually local charitable status. This equivalence to the ‘northern’ voluntary sector in combination with legal status, means that it is easy to fund NGOs. Conversely, funding trade unions or political parties, which are equally part of civil society, is far more complicated (though not impossible) because of rules about donor support to political activity. The most difficult civil society actors to fund will be those which operate in extra-legal space.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly for this article, ‘donors’ fund NGOs as part of their support for ‘good governance or democratisation’, because of crude connections made between civil society and democracy. Fowler and James (1995:6) comment that as the state is rolled back it needs to,

be made more accountable to its citizenry. Southern NGOs are thought to provide a vital mechanism for promoting democratic change by mediating between citizens and the state.

This argument typifies the policy arguments for NGOs in that there is no attempt to disaggregate civil society, with the result that NGOs instead of being seen as part of civil society, are conflated with civil society. In addition there is no disaggregation of approaches which could be employed to support democratisation. In Stewart's (1997) study of 30 donor agencies in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the majority of interviewees indicated that support for democratisation/good governance was part of their brief; that support for civil society was equivalent to support for democratisation and support to NGOs was the equivalent of support to civil society. Only one interviewee had a clearly articulated alternative perspective on support for governance programmes. His view was that it was a question of establishing whether the organisation concerned was working in areas broadly linked to democratisation; and looking at the leverage points used by the organisation and considering programmes to augment this work. Some examples of programmes supported by this donor included training in more effective use of media and lobbying skills.
If policy on support to civil society is constructed crudely with no attempt either to disaggregate organisations within civil society or to consider what activities should be supported, there are several consequences. The broad effect is that policy on which organisations get aid money tends to be undiscriminating provided that the organisational form fits. This appears to set off a chain reaction at country level, beginning with poor NGO performance and followed by donor reaction in the form of selection procedures becoming more ad hoc and arbitrary, depending on word of mouth from other ‘donors’ (Stewart, 1997) rather than on objective performance tests. Organisations in extra-legal space may be invisible. Finally, it creates a situation where organisations can adopt certain forms in order to attract funding rather than because they are viable organisational forms. Is there an alternative model of support for civil society?

An Alternative Model of Support for Civil Society

If an alternative model for support to civil society is to be developed, two questions are critical. The first is ‘what is the objective to be achieved through support to civil society?’ Hadenius and Uggla (1996:1622) suggest two models for support to civil society. The first is ‘pluralist’ – the presence in society of numerous, autonomous organisations which are capable of influencing and do influence the state. The second is ‘educative’. This involves creating support for democracy ‘through the experience gained from a long standing participation in democratic structures’. It is clear from this model, that, depending on what donors wish to achieve through support to civil society, different organisational characteristics are important. If the pluralist model is favoured, what is important is the organisations’ relationship to the state (degree of bargaining power) and ability to co-operate with other organisations as a method of increasing bargaining power. If the educative option is favoured, the important organisational characteristics are inclusiveness and democratic structures which provide interests in which democracy can be practised through participation.

The second question is what can be achieved in a given context? Answering this question requires analysis of the nature of the state where civil society is to be promoted. The critical indicator is the degree of legal space allowed to civil society. This can be shown diagrammatically in four stages (see page 28).

This table sets out stages as if they were mutually exclusive. In fact some states exhibit combinations of these characteristics. The critical issue is the balance of bargaining power between state, market and citizenry/civil society. In terms of development policy, a stage 3 state presents the greatest challenge, as there is need and potential for change, but great incentive (increased by ‘donor’ funding), for the formation of organisations which are legal, but do not challenge the state. Zimbabwe combines facets of a stage 2 and stage 3 state and occasionally borders on stage 4 status. Vivian and Maseko discuss the general contention that governments will not tolerate NGO activities which challenge the status quo (1994:38). They note that there is little evidence of such intolerance in Zimbabwe and comment that:

these data may be taken to imply either that the Zimbabwean Government is relatively open to NGO activities, or that Zimbabwean rural development NGOs do not in fact make substantial efforts to change the status quo (or some combination of these).
### Table 1: Legal Space Allowed to Civil Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1: Legitimate</th>
<th>Stage 2: Post-structural adjustment</th>
<th>Stage 3: Legal; illegitimate</th>
<th>Stage 4: Authoritarian, limited legality, no legitimacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Form:</strong> norm</td>
<td>Democratic forms; democratic norms.</td>
<td>Democratic forms; norms favor commercial interests.</td>
<td>Varies, either democratic forms; undemocratic norms (apartheid South Africa); or no democratic forms or norms (Zaire).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Space-race status</strong></td>
<td>Public space open to all manner of civil society organisations.</td>
<td>Public space occupied by commercial interests and concerns - the billboard factor.*</td>
<td>Small to non-existent legal public space, state takes over, co-opts civil society functions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Civil society protected?</strong></td>
<td>Autonomy of civil society organisations protected.</td>
<td>The most powerful organisations in civil society are commercial interest groups. They may lobby successfully for rules to restrict the activities of other groups within civil society, particularly trade unions.</td>
<td>Civil society if it exists, exists only to extend the reach of the state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Freedom from, Freedom to</strong></td>
<td>At constitutional level: 'freedom to' participate protected by freedom of speech, press and association.</td>
<td>Commercial 'freedom from' intervention respected; deregulation of industry from environmental, employment rules. Free movement of currency, but not necessarily of people.</td>
<td>Punitive, sometimes extreme punitive measures for challenging the state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Registration procedures?</strong></td>
<td>Legal status achieved through consistent simple registration procedures.</td>
<td>Easy registration procedures for commercial concerns, non-governmental registration may remain complex.</td>
<td>Complex arbitrary registration procedures, which nevertheless allow state-friendly organisations to register.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Constitution respected?</strong></td>
<td>Evidence that these procedures have been used, that constitutional change cannot be unilaterally overruled by the state.</td>
<td>National constitution preceded by international business concerns.</td>
<td>Arbitary administration, entirely dominated by the state. Organisations which challenge the state found in extra-legal space, either through failure to register or through banning orders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*One of the earliest effects of structural adjustment is often the multiplication of billboards, in actual public space, advertising foreign companies.*
The democratic forms which are present in stage 2 and stage 3 states present both a possibility for democratic change and the possibility that the form of democracy is used as a justification for bilateral and multilateral agencies to approach such countries, taking advantage of the ‘freedom from’ commercial intervention, but ignoring the absence of ‘freedoms to ‘participate, move freely, assemble etc. for the ordinary citizen. In addition the freedom to conduct business can be exploited by the state. In Zimbabwe for example significant privatisation has been in the form of the state/party (their functions are fused) purchasing large chunks of erstwhile parastatals which are retained as private monopolies, an example of freedoms used to entrench already existing interests (Okoth Ogenda, 1991:10). Zaire (MacGaffey, 1992) represents a stage 4 state whilst Burma and apartheid South Africa combine stage 4 and stage 3 characteristics. Of course, there should be no international support of any kind for such regimes, and of course there is, but it is more difficult to justify than support to countries such as Zimbabwe where the combination of liberalisation and democratic forms obscures the merging of state and party and how deregulation augments existing entrenched systems of exploitation.

In summary, if we assume that civil society is ‘potentially’ a highly subversive space, a space where ‘new structures may take hold to challenge the existing state order’ (Fatton, 1992:6) and assume further that such structures have the power to roll back the overweening power of the market and the state then two questions form the basis for an alternative model of support to civil society:

What is the objective of support for civil society and what type of organisations will meet these objectives? Answering this question requires decisions about what precisely is intended through support to civil society and specific strategies designed to achieve these objectives. Vague answers such as ‘rolling back the state’ need to be eschewed. Terms such as ‘the state’ should be disaggregated. Clark, for example presents the problem with development as official aid agencies and governments (1992:59). In fact the actual cause of the problem Clark cites – ‘local officials ... minutely involved ... [too much] scrutiny from the outside ...’ is not necessarily a failure of the central state, but a failure at lower levels of state bureaucracy. Robinson et al. (1995:92), commenting on the weakness of public aid programmes, refer to the ‘problems of local political pressures and petty corruption’. These are typically problems of a weak state, not problems of a state that is too strong. Clark’s pro-NGO recommendations are nevertheless based on the ‘state that is too strong’ perception. This contributes to a very specific definition of NGOs as something to be funded as an alternative to governments or states and worthy of being funded because of what they are not (government), rather than because of what they are. As well as making for more effective policy, precisely articulated strategies are provide benchmarks both for success and accountability.

What are the implications of this particular context for support to civil society? Answering this question requires a context audit, which combines the criteria set out in the table above, and a rule of law audit which looks at how the law functions and who it protects.

Instead of these two questions, three descriptive assumptions operate: that NGOs can increase popular participation in development, that NGOs are an important part of civil society, and that civil society can hasten democratisation by increasing popular participation in democracy. These assumptions are accorded the status of theories. They have a number of things in common.
They all result in the removal of a proportion of government funding and the substitution of funding for NGOs. The reasoning for the funding of NGOs is different in each theory, but the result is the same—ever increasing amounts of money for NGOs. Second, the concepts of civil society and NGOs are used instrumentally, that is as vehicles for donor policy objectives. Third, both policy thrusts are set against the low benchmarks of the development impasse. Fourth, the theories rest on assumptions about NGO and civil society ‘performance’ which are difficult to trace to any specific factors. There is a multiplicity of arguments that do no more than assert in a circular fashion the importance of NGOs and civil society. One example serves to illustrate this tendency to circular paper trails. In a recent publication on the role of southern NGOs (SNGOs) in development policy Fowler and James (1995:1) comment that,

*SNGOs are extremely heterogeneous, ranging over a wide spectrum from small loose-knit voluntary groups with few staff to multi-million dollar organisations employing hundreds ... A review of this nature cannot avoid broad generalizations which means that its contents cannot simply be applied to any particular country or SNGO. Be that as it may, INTRAC’s extensive experience and familiarity with published material provide grounds for believing that the issues raised would be of importance in any redefinition of policy towards the NGO community in the south.*

The same publication then goes on to comment on the notion of ‘comparative advantage’ (which is critical to the question of whether to fund NGOs), that ‘the limited information in this area is seldom disaggregated between Northern and Southern NGOs, ... it is difficult to separate out what may be important differences between the development impact of local and foreign’. ‘Extensive experience and familiarity with published material’, has in fact contributed very little baseline information on NGO performance.

Research on NGOs and civil society has been within the boundaries of the topic. In other words, instead of asking what the determinants of good development performance are, researchers have focused on how to improve the internal management of NGOs. This means that if there is something structurally or politically unworkable in the way that NGOs or civil society are envisaged by aid agencies, this may be missed altogether. Sahley’s comment (1995:8) is typical:

*Northern NGOs supporting local partners find that even after providing financial support and technical advice, some southern NGOs still fail to flourish. This is because many of the difficulties agencies face are not due to a lack of technical skills or poorly designed delivery systems, but reflect underlying organisational weaknesses and management constraints.*

This perspective dictates looking for answers in one area, rather than a more open-ended approach such as that of Tendler which starts with good performance and asks what contributes to this. Tendler’s 1994 discussion of good governance in Brazil is a good example. She discusses employees of the state health system working in the community, working on tasks which had nothing to do with health (such as cutting a baby’s hair) but fostered good relations. Good relations in turn assisted in closeness to target beneficiaries and ‘fine targeting of programmes’, supposedly the purview of NGOs and not the state. This illustrates what can be revealed by more open-ended research, that good results in a given area may be because of a method of approach rather than the type of organisation that does the approaching.
In spite of these problems, the term civil society is ‘being used ... enthusiastically by such powerful and august bodies as the World Bank and the OECD’ (Fierlbeck, 1995:15). Fierlbeck answers her own question by commenting that,

> analytical ambiguity can, unsurprisingly, be a considerable political virtue and especially so in consensus politics where agreement is more readily assured when parties are not always clear on what it is that they have agreed ... The fact that the main thrust of the World Bank’s governance project is to provide a more auspicious environment for market activity should not be lost in numerous references to limiting state power and strengthening civil society.

This raises the point that ‘those who would deal with states and communities, must also deal with markets’ (Evans, 1995:3). The market is present in all of the literature by default. The focus on the state as villain overlooks the increasing poverty associated with the global economy and overlooks unholy alliances between the state and markets in which liberalisation provides another set of tools for exploitation by entrenched interests. Finally, both the theory of NGO comparative advantage and the theory of NGOs as civil society, are stylistically distinguished by how nice they sound. This is a symptom of perhaps the most critical common aspect of the two approaches – that they lack a power analysis. The consequences of theory sans power analysis, have already been discussed. In short, if development interventions in civil society, ignore the question of power imbalance and pay for the introduction of democratic forms where there are no democratic norms, then these forms will only provide more weapons for exploitation and succeed in creating a number of impotent actors in legal space. These actors may serve as window-dressing or democratic credentials for undemocratic governments. At best this leads to ineffective policy, at worst because development agents run the risk of missing the determinants of good governance, they are increasing the risk of bad governance. Policies on good governance, which merely advocate the filling of civil society space with NGOs may merely be tips on democratic forms which will constitute sufficient window dressing to allow the continuance of aid flows.

Sheelagh Stewart is at the University of Sussex.

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New Development Agendas: Changes in UK NGO Policies & Procedures

Tina Wallace

This article reports on research carried out on changes in the operational management of a broad sample of British NGOs. Despite the diversity of NGOs it finds surprising convergence towards the application of certain managerial concepts and tools. Three of these – Strategic Planning, Logical Framework Analysis and Evaluation are considered in detail and the questions of why they are being used and for what purpose posed. The evidence is overwhelmingly that they have been adopted to meet Northern needs – to satisfy the demands of Northern funding institutions and to help NGO headquarters control growing organisations. Faced with this evidence the article looks critically at the claims that such NGO practice can be consistent with development theories which are based on greater empowerment of Southern ‘partners’ and is obliged to repeat arguments, previously thought to be widely accepted, that the use and understanding of such tools are culturally mediated and far from neutral.

Introduction

This article is based on research carried out by Tina Wallace, Andrew Shepherd and Sarah Crowther of the Development Administration group at Birmingham University. The impetus for the research arose from the fact that UK NGOs (and indeed NGOs across Europe) were undergoing major changes in the way they were approaching their development work: what were these changes what impact were they having on the NGOs and community level organizations that these international NGOs work with in the south? How were they impacting on and shaping the way development work is conceptualized and undertaken?

One critical area of the research was why these changes were being made and who was setting the agenda. During the research process it became clear that the role of the institutional donors was important. There has been a significant increase in aid channelled through UK NGOs by official donors over the past ten years. The Overseas Development Administration (ODA) of the British government spent £33,630,000 on NGOs in 1987/8; by 1994/5 this had increased to £161,773,000. Over 50 per cent of these budgets are spent on emergencies rather than development, but funding for development work has increased from around £14 million to almost £77 million in the same period.

Similarly the budget from the European Community (EC) to NGOs in Europe has greatly increased, from 266 million ECU in 1988 to 803 million ECU in 1994. Again while the special NGO Unit, the co-financing Unit, has been less rigorous the rest of the EC has demanded and received increasingly formalised requests for funding from
NGOs. They particularly focus on the need for adequate reporting from NGOs within the project framework.

As national treasuries in Europe become more demanding about accounting for money and proving effectiveness and performance pressure grows on aid donors to show that their work is clear, that they are having an impact and that they are providing value for money. These pressures are being passed on to NGOs in the form of growing demands for using logical frameworks, for evaluating work and measuring performance against these frameworks, for demonstrating impact.

However, NGOs do not necessarily have to conform to donor demands, especially those NGOs which raise substantial amounts of money from private sources or from trading. Yet they too are increasingly introducing these more standardised and formal methods and approaches in much of their work. A second key factor then is the push coming from NGOs themselves to 'go for growth'. They have grown and it seems now that they wish to continue to grow; most NGOs that have written a strategic plan put growth as a key aim for the organisation. Growth inevitably leads to changes within these organisations and requires the introduction of more bureaucratic and clear systems, for example, quality control. Increasingly size and complexity, along with a need to clarify and protect market share in an increasingly competitive market, are key factors pushing NGOs towards changes.

The desire to grow has led many UK NGOs in to taking increasing numbers of contracts and grants from institutional donors as the private donation market remains static or even starts to shrink (in relation to, for example, charity shop incomes) and thus they have increased their dependence on institutional donors and so made themselves more vulnerable to donor led demands.

A third key area of influence is undoubtedly the wider political and economic context where the privatisation of state roles, demands for accountability, the push for demonstrable effectiveness now characterise work in the public and voluntary sectors in UK and Europe. The growing moves to contracting, providing value for money, performance indicators and demonstrating impact within the UK society as a whole is undoubtedly affecting work in the development NGO sector. This becomes increasingly the case as NGOs compete with businesses for EC and ODA contracts in development and where they take more trustees on to their boards from the private sector – a trend which is clear in many UK NGOs.

Methodology

The focus of the research was on the tools and instruments that UK NGOs working in development use to apply for and disburse their funds, specifically on changes that have taken place within project and programme applications and implementation, and the reasons for those changes. Three key donors were also interviewed in depth, because one key concern in the research was to see how far institutional donors were dictating changes to NGOs: how far the changes they were making were driven from other sources including their own staff and staff learning, their partners in the south, trustees, academic thinking, and the wider political and economic environment in which they exist.

Clearly NGOs are complex organisations and there are major differences between them depending on their size, their origins, their mandates, their ideologies, how they raise their funds, how far they work directly in the field and how far they work through southern partners. In spite of the differences between them and the diversity
that characterises the NGO sector, the research highlighted some major common trends and growing similarities between many of them, having major implications for their partners and beneficiaries in the south.

The research was carried out with seventeen NGOs based in the UK: the sample was roughly representative in terms of common variables such as size or income of the wider population of NGOs involved in development. All received funding from at least one of the three major donors that were explored in the research: the Overseas Development Administration of the British government, the European Union and Charity Projects/Comic Relief, an organisation which disburses the substantial funds raised by a biannual television fund-raising spectacular.

Almost all NGOs have a real concern about confidentiality and what is said about them in the public domain. While they are often very open and self-critical within the NGO itself and in informal interviews and discussions, that openness tends to evaporate once the discussions moves in to the public arena. Their insistence on confidentiality as a condition of the research makes reporting the findings and analysing the situation problematic. Every effort is made here to be accurate while honouring the commitment made about confidentiality; sometimes this makes the report less clear and more opaque than the researchers would like.

**Current Debates: NGOs and the Changing Agendas**

The late 20th century is witnessing many revolutions in ideas (or paradigm shifts). In the post-cold war era conventional ideas about development have come under challenge principally from the economic agenda of the ‘new right’, advocating free trade and the demise of state-led development. The strongest part of this agenda lies in its adamance that market values conceptualised in the main centres of world capitalism are universal and unchallengable. Its components are firstly the enhanced role for the private sector, both national and international; and second the reduced and changed role of the state, which becomes an enabler and regulator rather than a provider and producer. All major donor agencies have been caught up in these ideas to a greater or lesser degree: significantly so in the cases of ODA and the EC. The 1980s and 1990s have seen donor agencies acting with increased confidence vis-à-vis aid-recipient countries, imposing conditions and negotiating policies in a way which would generally have been unthinkable in the 1960s and 1970s. The field of development thought has been dominated by the ideas of the new right since the mid-1980s (Fowler, 1992a; 1994a, b; Edwards & Hulme, 1995).

While many NGOs have reacted and lobbied against the implications of these policies, the new thinking has opened up further opportunities for NGOs precisely because they are not part of the public sector; they are seen to represent ‘civil society’ which is understood to be an important ingredient of the political pluralism which donors are now promoting in order to create or support liberal democracies in the south (Murphy & Augelli, 1993) (Endnote 1). The assumption is that these liberal democracies will provide a supportive environment for the development of private sector investment, which will drive the process of economic growth. NGOs have reacted in different ways to these changes: critically when lobbying on issues, positively when lobbying for increased resources.

The enhanced role for the private sector in national and international scenarios has generated its own *modus operandi* and language of development. ‘Contract’ is the *modus operandi*, with a focus on ‘deliverables’, measurable performance indicators
and the achievement of targets against which people can potentially be called to account. The assumption is usually that the process is at least partly under control. Financiers look for value defined in financial terms and in terms of efficiency. The perspective is often short term. Rational and deductive project models and quantitative planning tools fit best in this sort of framework: logical framework analysis (LFA) and cost-benefit analysis (CBA) are increasingly common (Riddell, 1996).

There is another tradition of development thought with which NGOs have been more closely identified historically. This highlights the need for a quality of economic growth which alleviates poverty and provides the basis for achieving other objectives in relation to social development, environmental improvement and human rights. Here development has not been defined exclusively as economic growth, which political and institutional development should serve; but has been seen as having a range of meanings including dignity, peace, mutual respect and tolerance, spiritual freedom, and health of the human being and planet. Development is increasingly understood to be complex, not amenable to general solutions but requiring analysis, understanding and the participation of the poor, including women. This is a vision of development expressed in different forms by Friere, Gandhi, Schumacher and more recently by environmental writers, organisational specialists like Korten, Chambers, and a wealth of writers approaching development from a gender perspective with an inherent structural and social analysis of poverty. It is fundamentally egalitarian.

This more people-oriented approach recognises the conflicts between different interest groups at all levels, including within communities, and works to recognise and challenge or reconcile differences rather than glossing over them. Development workers have to be ready to confront inequality and injustice, to work to build the capacity of organisations other than their own, and eventually to relinquish their power to those people whose lives are directly affected. This approach often stresses the importance of people's movements and organisations, and would see northern aid as a temporary phenomenon enabling these to develop and grow.

The language of learning is associated with this approach to development: the concept of the reflective practitioner who is able and open to learn from mistakes is crucially important to those wanting to work in this way (Schön, 1991). This approach requires an openness to the environment, an ability to encourage participation throughout the process and to relinquish power as the peoples' capacity is built and they are increasingly able to set the agenda and plan their own projects. Within this paradigm accountability to ordinary people is central, accepting the need for a long term perspective in working towards an uncertain future.

The writings of many concerned with gender stress the need to take a totally different approach to development to accommodate the voices and needs of women as well as men, and to address gender imbalances. While class analysis is no longer overtly part of the development vocabulary, as marxist concepts and language have largely gone from the agenda, other forms of structural analysis beyond gender also exist, such as attention to caste systems, disability and the recent burst of attention to urban stratification.

This approach to development has led to the rise of participatory methods (Endnote 2), attention to decentralisation of decision-making (Fowler, 1992b), bottom up strategic planning and other related strategies aimed at involving and empowering people previously seen as beneficiaries within projects.
The rural development ‘new paradigm’ popularised by Chambers, Korten and others, including participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods, has significantly brought people-centred approaches in to the mainstream of development. The UN, ODA, World Bank and government ministries have now adopted much of the language of participation and PRA (ODA; Gorgiendiere, 1995c; Pretty et al. 1994). The methods – visual, enjoyable, accessible and manageable – seek to build an equal dialogue between parties. Skills of technical specialists are judged in relation to local knowledge and realities, emphasizing that ‘new’ professionals need to work with humility in their relationships with local people (Chambers, 1983, 1986). The use of PRA methods is now established in much Northern NGO (NNGO) and Southern NGO (SNGO) practice and increasingly encouraged by donors (Goyder, 1995; Gorgiendiere, 1995), although many argue that the principles behind the original commitment have become weaker enroute, compromised by other influences and organisational needs. PRA has often now become more a means of consultation and communication than a platform for action; empowerment and participation have become increasingly neutral concepts more related to the practical aspects of project work than challenging wider structural or political issues.

Are These Two Approaches Complimentary or in Opposition?
There are clearly two different ‘languages’ of development being used at present: one of ‘new right’ growth and rational management and one of learning and people-centred development. There are major differences between them in their understanding of causes, problems and solutions to poverty, in their approaches to management of operational work and partnerships, and the methodologies they use.

Efforts to reconcile the two approaches and languages include notably the ideas of structured flexibility, the process project, the creation of the language of stakeholders, and the flexible, participatory use of LFA (several NGOs are actively working on finding this reconciliation). However, in practice, the result of combining the two approaches requires the evolution of a new homogenized language and concepts which are often used in widely different contexts without definition. Much of the language in development becomes depoliticised; power analysis and conflict are removed, contradictory ideas, concepts and approaches are robbed of their differences and pushed together in apparent reconciliation.

How far attempts to ‘marry’ these very different paradigms can or have worked, and the tensions and contradictions involved are an integral part of the analysis of this research. In the meantime, using the data from NGOs, primary and secondary literature, and some preliminary discussions in the south an attempt will be made to explain why there is need for real concern about this growing language of consensus and the denial of contradictions between these two approaches.

Changes in UK NGOs Policies and Procedures:
Strategic Planning, Project Management, and Evaluation
In presenting the changes observed within UK NGOs around policies and procedures for getting and disbursing aid the questions to be answered are: how far are these new methods, procedures and approaches enabling the NGOs to deliver on the mandates and visions they hold to and on the basis of which they raise funds and public awareness? The yardstick is one set by NGOs themselves, their own claims and publicly stated aims and objectives such as working with the poorest, listening to
people and working participatively, responding, promoting local organisations, working in solidarity with marginal people.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a relatively new tool in the arsenal of NGOs. It is a tool for planning at a programme and global level, moving away from focusing on projects alone; strategic planning can provide a framework within which decisions about projects can be made in a wider context. All of the larger NGOs, and many middle size ones, have been undertaking strategic planning during the past four or five years, either at the field or HQ level, or both.

Why strategic planning? Strategic planning was introduced in many NGOs for a number of reasons, including:

- **Growth in NGOs**: Many NGOs grew dramatically in the mid-1980s and continued to expand over the next decade (Oxfam grew by 7% p.a. and SCF 11% p.a. over this period), some grew as much as 20% p.a. and more. This resulted in a rapid growth of staff turnover, new people being brought in for new functions such as professional fund-raising, marketing, advocacy. Restructuring became common and in this context strategic planning was seen to be a vehicle for providing a unifying framework for managing rapid change.

- **A crisis of 'developmentalism'**: In the context of the apparently inexorable rise of conflict, growing poverty and misery in many of the countries where they have worked, strategic planning was adopted by many NGOs to try and reaffirm or rediscover their mandate. Stakeholder analysis was used to try and root the NGOs within a wider context and to establish where their support and legitimacy came from.

- **The search for a niche and 'profile' in development**: NGOs have been concerned to identify their particular strengths and create a niche for their work. Strategic planning has been about situating some NGOs within what they increasingly perceive as 'their market place', with the public and with institutional donors. It is a response to an acknowledged problem of competition between UK NGOs for funding.

- **The role of external consultants**: Many NGOs brought in external management and organisation consultants to assist with their restructuring and planning processes. Some worked with several NGOs and promoted similar ideas to each of them.

Different Approaches to Strategic Planning

Strategic planning can be undertaken in a number of ways: as a way of directing the organisation from the top; in a consultative way with the final decision resting with senior managers; in a more participatory way as part of a wider approach to strategic management and strategic thinking; or as a method where field offices and sometimes project partners in the South can either plan for themselves without a set of directives from headquarters or play a role in shaping the corporate plan as a whole.

It can also be used in different ways. While in theory a strategic plan can be more about setting broad directions and providing a flexible tool which enables staff on the
ground to make decisions and change direction on the basis of experience, while working within the broad mandate and priorities set by the organisation, this is not how they are used in practice in most NGOs. In practice the written plan often appears to become more important in allocating budgets and measuring progress than the process; what has been put on paper can become more important than promoting the ability of staff to think and work strategically.

NGOs have used different approaches. For many organisations, where the plan has been developed at headquarters or by senior staff with minimal consultation, staff experience these plans as top-down and often as an imposition on them. They can cause resentment, and may not serve the purpose of pulling the organisation together. For those organisations using participatory techniques, many have found that strategic planning is time consuming, demanding and complex for staff. It is an expensive process, where staff need a lot of support, guidance, training, outside information and assistance as they reflect on their past practice, the work of those around them, and their future role. Specialist staff and trainers, external consultants and facilitators have all been employed to enable offices to undertake strategic planning. It is a process which absorbs significant amounts of staff time and resources in many agencies.

In spite of many problems encountered around the process, some agencies say that over time staff in the field have built better teams as a result of strategic planning, they have become more focused, and in some cases the focus of country programmes has changed radically and new programmes have opened and old ones closed. However, the conflicts generated by strategic planning, by the different perceptions among staff about the overall priorities and best methods for development, have not proved easy to resolve. Ultimately the senior management do make the final decisions, and many of those whose views conflict with those in the final plan may feel aggrieved; field staff are said to feel that their views and plans are marginalised or receive less attention than HQ views when the final corporate plans are drawn up.

In answer to the question several of them have raised, 'what is the role of a northern NGO at the end of the twentieth century?' many of the larger and established agencies have answered: they need to grow and raise more money and increase their influence, they need to have a high public profile for advocacy and lobbying work as well as building up their development work in the south. Most NGOs with a strategic plan or set of principles do focus on the dual approach of development work on the ground and dissemination/lobbying/advocacy work, with a growing emphasis on advocacy work. Interestingly few NGOs have as a strategic aim the desire to raise the profile of development education work in UK, something Smillie and other observers (Smillie, 1995) believe that they are ignoring at their peril.

Concerns about the introduction of strategic planning processes, and questions for further research

There are several implications arising from the introduction of strategic planning by different NGOs. While some strategic planning tools are flexible and can be adapted to be of value to staff in the field, they are still tools that have been drawn from a northern context, using concepts and thinking taken initially from the US corporate world of planning. While the tools were developed by business to cope with change and turbulence, situations certainly facing NGOs at home and abroad, they were also designed to enable businesses to survive and grow in increasingly competitive and
unpredictable markets, and to promote competitiveness between businesses. Strategic planning was intended to help businesses clarify their distinctive position and to promote the uniqueness of their products.

Whether the use of strategic planning is also promoting this degree of competition between NGOs needs assessing, as does the likely impact of increased competition on development work. This is a critical issue in the light of the proliferation of NGOs and given the scale of the problems they are attempting to address. While competition for fund-raising is seen by all NGOs to be critical to their survival and strategic planning is used to help them position themselves in relation to donors (private and public), what is the impact of this competition between NGOs on development in the south? Writers such as Carlie and Christie (1992) would suggest such competition could be very detrimental to development work.

It will be important in the next phase of the research to see how far staff and partners based in the south experience strategic planning as a limiting or restrictive tool, how the different strategic plans of donor UK NGOs are negotiated, and how these plans fit with the aspirations and plans of local people and organisations. Where one Southern NGO works with several European or US NGOs and they all present the NGO with different but defined strategic plans, the impact could be nightmarish. It will be important to see how far there is, or is not, a difference in experience between those staff and partners who have been involved in the strategic planning exercise, and those who have been excluded. In one experience Christian Aid brought thirty partners over to discuss their strategic plan and the partners said that they had experienced aspects of this process as top-down, directive, and an erosion of their right to set the agenda.

As UK NGOs strategically plan their work, it is likely that, despite efforts to include Southern partners, this will mean that agendas and priorities are set in the north, with more or less input from staff and partners in the South.

**Changes in Project Management**

In recent years the majority of NGOs have moved to tighten up their project management procedures, to make them more rigorous and formal. The majority of those surveyed now use a logframe analysis approach (LFA), or have a set of guidelines that follow a similar format and set of questions as LFA. Many have introduced these new frameworks within the past three to five years. When the Joint Funding Scheme (JFS) of the ODA first ran a seminar on LFA in 1989 most of the participants, including the social development advisors to the JFS, did not know what this was or did not know how to use it. Today almost all NGO project and programme planners and fund-raisers are familiar with logframes, or the principles and key elements of LFA. Their use when applying for funds from certain parts of ODA (Endnote 3) or EC is obligatory.

The logical framework to which these initials apply is a method which relates ‘objectively verifiable indicators’ of achievement, means of verification and underlying assumptions to certain major components of a project – its goal, its purpose, its inputs and outputs in a neat tabular form in which no statement is longer than a short paragraph. It claims to allow complex projects to be summarised on one or two sheets of paper. Clear links to the preceding strategic plan may be shown; the framework for subsequent monitoring and evaluation is mapped out. Critics wonder to what extent reality is allowed to intrude into such a neat package.
Four of the agencies which used this approach in the 1980s used it in a ‘blueprint’ way and recently they have moved to modify this to a more process approach in order to incorporate more local participation, accommodate regional variation and difference within their project planning documents. However, three of these agencies, Plan International, Actionaid, and World Vision continue to operate within a culture of management information systems, quantitative indicators and the use of clearly defined aims, objectives, inputs, outputs, outcomes and impact. World Vision (UK) say that because many of their offices in the south relate to organisations such as USAID and European agencies where ‘blueprint planning’ and ‘off the shelf’ projects are the norm, their staff find being asked to implement a more process approach problematic.

SOS Sahel introduced Action Research in the field in 1990, as an antidote to the blueprint approach; and they are certainly moving away from their technical approach to planning large scale environmental projects into a ‘learning approach’ with a stress on participation and developing the project over time, devolving major decisions about the project to the staff on the ground. Birdlife has also moved from a highly technical approach to conservation to a much more people and process led one, with a clear preference at least for a substantial learning process before any project is formulated. The difficulty they both say they are encountering is to get funding for the initial learning period.

There are some other exceptions to the widespread adoption of logframes or related planning tools in the older, more established, and larger agencies which work through partners, and some small agencies which have no established planning and management tools. Among the older agencies working through local NGOs and CBOs, the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development (CAFOD) is a good example: all project material is provided by southern partners to CAFOD staff in the way they find most appropriate. CAFOD project staff then present it to Committees under a set of compulsory headings such as aims and objectives, project description, report on progress and budgets.

Save the Children Fund (SCF), are currently revising their format in order to try and combine a framework which will meet many of the donor needs (to save duplication of effort) and the needs of SCF to track and reflect on their own strategic objectives. It is a format that SCF hopes will combine logical and analytical thought with a flexible and participatory approach, allowing for elements of uncertainty. They say, like many NGOs, that they need a standard format for donors, for comparison across projects, for learning, and for publicity work, but they also want to increase local and staff consultation and participation. These different elements are not, however, proving easy to combine in practice.

**Issues raised by NGOs relating to the increasing use of LFA or related project planning tools**

Many donors and NGOs argue that there is no conflict between a responsive, bottom up, flexible process ‘a learning approach’ and the project cycle, even when the project cycle is framed in the rational mode of a logframe. ZOPP and Teamup, among other versions of the LFA, are said to enable logical analysis to be flexible and participatory, incorporating the views of the different stakeholders (ODA/NGO workshop, 1995). This view was strongly expressed by some participants at a workshop held to discuss this research. A minority of NGOs and individual staff say they have no problems with LFA, claiming it promotes good discipline, and once learned properly it is easy
to use well. They feel problems with LFAs may not be due to the tool itself but to people's use of it. Some, like Plan International, feel they can use these Management Information Systems but make them more sensitive to local realities by allowing for regional diversity and the development of relevant indicators in each context.

Certainly many donor staff and their advisors think that LFA is a useful tool which they encourage NGOs to use. They see it as one tool among others, a tool to aid clear thinking and communication. LFA is seen to facilitate concise representation in a logical format with a terminology that is understood internationally. They argue that it is not a rigid tool in itself, though it does have tendencies towards a blueprint approach in the way it is often used; it encourages does people to think systematically and look both within and outside the project when planning.

However, many other NGOs raised serious questions during the course of this research and at the workshop about how far it is possible to reconcile a participatory, culturally appropriate, bottom-up, process approach with the use of rational planning tools, tied to a project cycle. CAFOD were explicit about the contradictions between the different world views embodied in the different approaches. For example, some of their partners are motivated to work in development from religious beliefs and they have very different criteria for assessing projects and their success. They tend to want to be inclusive, their approach is often spiritual as well as material, holistic rather than compartmentalised. A project may be judged successful if many are involved even if it doesn't achieve, for example, the repayment rates or incomes expected and hoped for; the project is seen within the wider context of the people's lives.

Other NGO staff expressed concern about the glaring differences they see between the language and methods used in project planning and the perspectives of their partners/beneficiaries, stressing the impossibility of even translating the words in LFA let alone the concepts behind the words. They said that such imposed language cannot promote a genuinely participative approach which needs to come from people in terms and forms they are comfortable with. Managing these differences in approach does actually force some NGO staff into duplicity, for example, writing clearly defined proposals to meet donor demands which they know conflict with the understanding and experience of the people they are working with. Some small NGOs pay consultants to write their LFA and grant applications for them. Different interviewees expressed other concerns about LFA and rational project planning in these ways (their words have been paraphrased):

LFA is a tool primarily based on the project-cycle (though there are experiments with programming using LFA) so it ties NGOs tightly into the use of 'the project' as the way to deliver development. This is happening at a time when more and more people are questioning the usefulness of projects as vehicles for promoting real social change. Projects are an artificial construct which are often better designed to meet the need for disbursing funds in an accountable way than meeting the needs of those who are trying to tackle the processes which keep them in poverty.

LFA is too tight and rational; the staff and partners in the field dislike it. The work used to be about finding a development idea and working that in to a proposal, now it is primarily about writing a successful proposal. It is no longer field led/field up, but matrix led. Local people's ideas are rejected because they do not easily fit the framework. This matrix is imposed, and often forces people to make up answers in order to fill in the proposals.
It cannot be really be useful for a 'process' approach to development, because too much data is needed too early on. NGOs, unlike ODA, do not usually get money for initial research/piloting, so have no time to develop a participatory logframe through an extended period of interaction. They have to present one straight away, in order to get their funding.

LFA is a weak tool for assessing the quality of the work, or the long term impact.

These statements were challenged by a donor who claimed that 'NGOs are not so stupid as to adopt tools that are unhelpful, nor so lacking in integrity that they adopt them solely to please donors'; however the research data contradicted this view. Despite their unease several staff whose organisations are highly dependent on institutional donors say they have no choice. The experience of SOS Sahel which is changing its approach to a more 'learning approach' is that they feel that their openness about the need to learn as they go and not set tight parameters on new projects may be held against them by donors. Projects which are widespread, where indicators of impact and effectiveness are particularly hard to define are facing difficulties in getting funding; these projects include networking and information projects run by small NGOs. Many NGOs said they did not find LFA helpful in their work but they had to use them for funding purposes.

While the current talk among donors and UK NGOs is of participation, partnership, institution and capacity building, strengthening civil society, sustainability, the project management tools being increasingly used, all of which are closely tied to the 'project', have come out of a different tradition concerned with control, rational planning, measurability, accountability and short-term impacts. They require extensive paperwork and reporting. There appears to be a potentially serious disjuncture between the stated goals of much NGO development work and many of the rational project management tools that are being used. These tools may well meet the needs of donors for the efficient disbursement of funds better than the needs of partners/beneficiaries for taking control, participating and setting their own agendas for tackling social change.

The Push for Increased Evaluation within NGOs

Evaluation is widely acknowledged to be a weak area for NGOs: 'very few NGOs, big or small, have a portfolio of representative evaluations of past projects which they place in the public domain' ((ODI, 1996). Ian Smillie has documented many reasons for the past weaknesses in evaluation in NGOs (Smillie, 1995). First, in order to raise money, especially from the public, they have to promise too much. Development is far more complex than the slogans they use so they build too high expectations of what they can really achieve. Thus they are reluctant to share their actual experiences. Second, the project system, with its clear aims and objectives, does not necessarily reflect realities or yield good results in terms of social development which is long term and not easily packaged into projects. NGOs are asked to evaluate their projects, yet evaluating a project is like evaluating a patch of water in the ocean' (Carlie & Christie, 1992). A third area he identifies is rooted in the voluntary culture which he sees as often biased against learning and more focused on doing, and getting things done.

There appear to be two different motivations and purposes for the current increase in work in this area: one is certainly the demand for accountability from the donors. This is becoming increasingly important for NGOs as donors start to question whether they are as effective in reaching the poor, keeping costs down, promoting
participation, and achieving results as they have claimed in the past (Tendler, 1982). Proving their worth becomes critical in a competitive funding market so this approach to evaluation is closely associated with the need to show donors and others how money has been used, to demonstrate what has been achieved. In recent years, as more money has been pumped through the UK NGO sector, more questions have been asked by donors, the Treasury, and trustees in many agencies about how this money has been used. Has the money achieved its purpose? In an attempt to meet these demands for proof of effectiveness there has been a push to increase the level of evaluation work, and to develop indicators for measuring impact (Oxfam, Novib and Actionaid are among the agencies undertaking research on developing indicators for measuring impact). The majority of smaller NGOs said that they were doing more evaluations primarily to meet donor demands. They said their field staff often find these evaluations onerous, and the results rarely assist the project in improving its work because the criteria used and methods employed were chosen by the donor not by staff, partners or beneficiaries. It appears hard to learn from externally imposed evaluations. It is interesting to note that none of the three donors (JFS, EC, CPCR) had analysed these or drawn clear lessons from them, and they have never met together to discuss or share their findings on the effectiveness and impact of NGO work in different countries or sectors.

The methods used are primarily designed to see how far the project has achieved its stated aims and objectives. The project is the framework, and it becomes essential to find tangible benefits or changes to assess. The time allowed for these evaluations (which are costly) is often short so there is pressure to focus on the more obvious aspects of the project. Smillie (1994) reports that these evaluations often ignore the key elements in the development process such as who has been excluded, who was able to participate and why, who is benefiting and how. The focus is more on numbers, measurables or ‘results’ – often as predetermined in the logframe analysis – than sequences and processes, which are often hard to detect, long term and difficult to capture. While some of these evaluations attempt to foster participation it is clear that they are primarily for the purposes of accountability and the key stakeholder is the donor or the trustee body. They are often experienced by those undergoing them as forms of policing and control.

A different motivation for evaluation work is related to the perceived need for those working on development projects to learn from experience in order to change ongoing or future work. This approach (Rondanelli, 1993; Schön, 1991 and others) comes from an understanding of development as a largely unknown area, difficult and risky, where monitoring and evaluation are essential tools for understanding and learning, for extending and promoting participation, for making changes, and for drawing out lessons. Carlie and Christie talk (1992), within this paradigm, of the strategic value of acknowledging failure and learning from mistakes, not hiding or ignoring them. Some agencies have focused at least some of their evaluation work on a learning approach based in the field, defining the beneficiaries as the most important interest group in the evaluation. Here questions are developed by the staff and beneficiaries working on the project in the field; participatory methods are often used. Many staff within agencies feel that ongoing monitoring by the staff, partners and beneficiaries may be more useful and important in the development of the project, than external evaluations at the end.

However, while there is much discussion about participatory ways of working not many examples of participatory evaluations focused on learning and increasing accountability to participants were presented by the UK NGOs. Experiences of
innovative and participatory monitoring and evaluation directed at participants in the projects may prove easier to find in the countries of the south because the primary focus of these evaluations lies at project and country office or partner level.

There are potential conflicts between these two reasons for undertaking more monitoring and evaluation. When the focus is on accountability to donors the need to 'put the best gloss' on experience is clear; there is a concern to conceal failure, reduce risk, and to conform to donor paradigms and expectations. If a genuinely learning approach is taken then failure becomes openly discussed and analysed, problems are aired and not hidden. Also the methods are likely to be quite different; evaluations for donors tend to be done by outside consultants, the parameters are often set by the logframe analysis against which results are measured, they are carried out in a short time, with reports written primarily for the funders. For those focusing more on learning the process may be long term, more participatory, designed by staff, partners and beneficiaries, with results being primarily for those involved in the project/programme. The process may look far wider than the parameters of the project, taking into account myriad other factors affecting the progress of social change; reporting may be through role play, village meetings, video, workshops with far less reliance on written reports.

Whose Project or Programme is it Anyway?
Perhaps at the heart of this debate between the two different motivations and purposes for evaluation lies another question, raised by CAFOD: who owns the project? Whose paradigm, whose voice should be heard above all others? Is it the person who pays, the one with the power, or is it the people whose lives are being directly affected by the work? Stakeholder analysis, while an attempt to reconcile the different needs/perspectives of different players, doesn't really address this fundamental question which is at the heart of many conflicts within NGOs and between NGOs and donors. Does the project belong to the donor, to the NGO, to the staff, to local NGOs or to the people affected? Whose view of development should be paramount?

Impact of these Changes in the North
While the long term interest of this research is how the changes discussed above impact on development work and affect relations with staff, partners and beneficiaries in the south, some interesting observations were made by NGO staff about the effect of these changes on northern NGOs and staff in the UK; these include:

- a growth in the number of staff employed to write project guidelines, evaluation guidelines, strategic planning guidelines, and to undertake work in these areas. There are real costs to the rising demands for accountability especially felt in smaller agencies where donors are unwilling to fund core costs, and often even the evaluations they demand;

- a growth in observable tensions and conflicts between staff over the ideology and ethos of the NGO, with staff taking different positions in relation to the rational, planned approach to development, and the more open learning approach;

- dramatic changes in the language used to describe and discuss development within NGOs;
changes in recruitment patterns with more specialised, qualified staff, often
with a background in commercial organisations replacing those who had
possibly less qualifications but more field experience;

many agencies getting involved in constant restructuring as they try to change
their programme and project management, policies and procedures, and
reconcile the needs of fund-raising and public profile and advocacy work with
the need to work effectively in the field;

those working in gender often continuing to feel marginalised and excluded
from the key fora of decision making. In some agencies gender perspectives are
not incorporated into the main planning and implementation documents, and
taking a gender approach has not led to radical change within most NGOs.

Impact in the South

None of the changes discussed here being made to project and programme
management in UK NGOs have come about because of pressures from partners or
staff in the South. They are not based on learning from the south. Yet these changes
undoubtedly impact on the work in the south in a number of significant ways because
Northern NGOs are among the key donors to development work in the south; they
often compete with southern NGOs for bi- and multilateral contracts; they provide a
lot of the training; and they have real influence in many countries where they work.

Little work has been done to date by either donors or UK NGOs to see how these
changes are effecting the work and thinking of staff and partners and organisations
involved in development work in the countries of the south. One study that was
carried out in East Africa by Muchungunzi (Muchungunzi & Milne, 1995) however,
confirms much of the anecdotal and conversational evidence collected during the
current research project. That research carried out with over 100 NGOs in East Africa
found that SNGOs feel they are always responding to the changing agendas of the
north, they are rarely or never setting the agendas. Specific problems and issues
identified were:

- problems encountered around the concepts and language being used by
  NNGOs in development;
- their resentment that their values, customs, culture, language were not taken in
to account;
- the lack of flexibility in many of the methods and approaches which do not
  enhance participation or community development;
- a lack of respect for their work and their societies in the North; the need to use
  positive and not negative images;
- they feel their input is undervalued and the views and work of NNGOs is over-
  valued: donor money and expertise is more valued than Southern labour and
  expertise;
- the South always has to account to the North and not vice versa.

While NNGOs talk constantly about their differences and diversity the SNGOs did
not differentiate between the different northern NGOs they worked with, indeed they
lumped NGOs and institutional donors all together in their responses. The available data suggests that the rational methods and approaches increasingly being used by NNGOs are unlikely to challenge such perceptions.

Conclusions

If, as this initial phase of the research suggests, these changes are not likely to enhance some of the stated aims of UK NGO development work on the ground, why are they being made? In whose interest or for what reasons are these changes being increasingly widely introduced?

What is clear from the research to date is that, with the exception of some of the work going on in participatory methods and approaches and some of the work around gender, where southern partners and individuals are in the forefront and where the work is often driven from the field rather than headquarters, these changes are being made to fit in with agendas being set in the north not because of learning and inputs from the south. These agendas reflect institutional donor priorities, NNGO desire for growth, a growing 'professionalism' and the wider realities of the European political economy.

It is clear that there is a vast gap between those promoting logframes and associated ways of planning and implementing projects, and those advocating participatory approaches which should genuinely start from the knowledge and understanding of the people concerned. Writers such as Long and Long, Long and Villareal (1992) stress the way power affects knowledge and the need to understand domination and power within the discourse. They talk of the 'dominant or potentially disempowering alien discourse of formal research' and by extension tools such as LFA. They talk of the reality that 'power differences and struggles over social meaning are central to an understanding of knowledge processes'. The use of these tools excludes rural people's knowledge and conceptual frameworks; their reality is divided up into separate resources, units or groups, projects. These writers, along with, for example, Scoones and Chambers challenge researchers, extension workers and others to re-examine 'whose knowledge counts, who carries out the analysis and whose representation is recorded' (IIED, 1993). These arguments are complex and extensive, a quotation from Scoones (1993) puts the issue succinctly:

> every system of knowledge, agricultural science and rural people's knowledge included, has its own epistemology, its own theory of what constitutes and what counts as knowledge. The shortcomings of positivist, rationalist, western scientific epistemologies have been widely discussed and debated for many years. This critique undermines the assumption of a positivist view of investigation that sees knowledge as a tangible stock, body or store to be tapped, extracted and documented.

These questions are being raised by some NGOs and the researchers but were discounted by the majority of people involved in this research. It remains an issue of concern how the use of such specific tools, derived from a particular way of understanding how knowledge can be generated, used and developed in USA business worlds and modified in Europe, can possibly enable the voices and views of staff and partners in different countries, and the voices of the poor to be heard; how can they shape the process of social change within the project framework?

It seems incredible that an increasing number of NGOs with different mandates, missions, aims and objectives, working in a wide diversity of cultures and contexts
should find it appropriate to use similar methods for framing and presenting their work. Can 'one framework fit all' in reality? The implication that one tool can be used in any context appears to take little or no account of the work done in cultural studies or understanding of how each tool carries within it concepts and understanding which may conflict with the perspectives of others. In the feedback to the first report it was possible for one (donor) commentator to write:

You say that it is ironical that so many organisations with such different objectives use logframes. This is to misconstrue logframes and imply that they make people focus on particular kinds of objectives. I'd say it was no more ironical than that people with different objectives wear clothes, work in offices or use computers.

Such insistence that tools such as those discussed in this paper are neutral is disturbing. If, as it appears, such views are becoming widely shared by NNGOs or by decision makers within NNGOs, this would certainly seem to undermine their claims to a more profound understanding of the lives of the people they exist to help and to promoting uniquely supportive and appropriate ways of working.

Tina Wallace is at the University of Birmingham.

Endnotes

1. On civil society: The confusion surrounding the use of this term was apparent at a recent ODA sponsored discussion on the issue. However, for the purposes of this paper I am using it because NGOs and donors use it, and I am using it in the loose way many of them do to mean broadly the building of organisations and institutions and strengthening the relations between them as a counter-weight to the power of the state and market and as a channel for demanding rights and the private provision of benefits. Donini (1995), Robinson (1995) and Bebbington and Mitlin (1996b) place NGOs in the growing debate about the concept of civil society in development programming, and this is also the topic of a newly launched BOND working group and likely theme for ESCOR-ODA research into 1997 and beyond (also Green, 1992, who is heavily critical of NGOs in this context).

2. Much of this move in the north and Britain in particular was fuelled by Robert Chambers who was leading investigations into local people’s access to self-sufficiency and sustainable livelihoods in the early 1980s. Chambers, with significant academic, financial and NGO backing, stimulated a strong school of practical and experimental methods around PRA. The school used new publishing channels strategically and effectively, to open the floor (on methods at least) to many southern developmentalists.

3. This process will intensify following a Fundamental Expenditure Review of ODA which requires all ODA funding to be dispursed through instruments such as strategic plans and logframe analysis.

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Aid, NGOs and Grassroots Development: Northern Burkina Faso

Nicholas Atampugre

The last two decades (and perhaps the next decade) could be described as the age of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs). These organisations have become important players on the development scene. They are also major recipients of international aid. Between 1970 and 1990 aid channelled through NGOs rose from $2.7 billion to $7.2 billion. This trend has continued, with the OECD estimating in 1993 that northern NGO spending is between $9 billion and $10 billion annually. The significance of NGO involvement is particularly marked in Africa. For example, in 1991 forty-four World Bank assisted projects implemented by associated local NGOs took up 55 per cent of all loans and credits granted Africa that year (Marcussen, 1996:406). The increasing importance of what remains a poorly defined and heterogeneous sector is reflected not only in the amount of resources being channelled through these organisations but also in the increasing controversy surrounding their role in Africa's development.

In this article, we review the experiences of two UK based NGOs – Oxfam-UK/Eire and ACORD – who have been promoting (for nearly two decades now) grassroots development in a country which has not recently experienced conflict – Burkina Faso. We draw lessons from their experiences and suggest that whilst some good work has been done, northern NGOs facilitating the emergence of grassroots organisations still face enormous challenges.

Introduction

The phenomenal growth of organisations of all sorts wearing the NGO label is no longer solely a northern or European feature; in 1989, there were estimated to be about 4,000 NGOs in OECD member countries (Edwards & Hulme, 1992). The African middle classes, in the footsteps of their northern equivalents, are discovering that it pays to form and even more to lead an NGO as donor governments and multilateral agencies move their thrust from government to non-state actors. Multilateral agencies such as the World Bank and overseas development administrators of European governments have embraced NGOs as vehicles for filling gaps created by retreating state structures. This retreat is primarily the outcome of structural adjustment programmes under implementation in many countries of Africa.

The current enthusiasm for NGOs and their 'controversial' roles in the Somalia and Rwanda conflicts have brought renewed interest and scrutiny. As northern NGOs struggle for their share of the development aid being channelled to conflict areas like...
Rwanda, Zaire and Liberia, researchers, donors (and in some cases the very NGOs themselves) are increasingly critical of NGO claims to capacity building, cost-effectiveness, participatory development and all the 'values' that NGOs have for most part paid mainly lip-service to. It is within the context of institutional development and capacity building that this article seeks to make a contribution.

In this article, we review the experiences of two UK based NGOs – Oxfam-UK/Eire and ACORD – who have been promoting (for nearly two decades now) grassroots development in a country which has not recently experienced conflict – Burkina Faso. We draw lessons from their experiences and suggest that whilst some good work has been done, northern NGOs facilitating the emergence of grassroots organisations still face enormous challenges. The way in which these agencies intervene, the importance of external resource flows in the survival and effectiveness of Community Based Organisations (CBOs; Endnote 1) and the relationship of dependence of local organisations on international aid are all factors which can undermine the emergence and/or strengthening of autonomous local structures. Although southern NGOs will continue to rely on international financial support, CBOs and local NGOs can improve their relationship with international aid and external NGOs if the leadership of the respective organisations have their own vision of the society that they want to promote, retain the support of their membership, and learn how to play the 'game' to their advantage. A relationship of interdependence is possible if the leadership of local organisations realise that whilst they may be financially dependent on international aid, northern NGOs do need them too if they are to survive in this fiercely competitive NGO industry. After all, NGOs and the voluntary sector provide employment for a significant number of people in donor countries.

We begin our review by first establishing why international agencies, and NGOs such as ACORD and Oxfam-UK/Eire have found it necessary to intervene in Burkina Faso. We highlight the problems of food and livelihood security in Burkina Faso. Recent politics of that country have had an important influence on the character of grassroots organisations. It is for this reason that we draw attention to the legacy of the Sankara years. Although Village Groups (VGs; used generically for all village level organisations whose objective is to advance the interests of their members and promote the development of their respective communities), have their origins in French colonial history they have, in the Sahel of Burkina Faso, been appropriated by village communities and are in several areas, being transformed into vehicles for advancing village interests. They are, in some cases, making remarkable efforts to improve the well-being of their members and communities with or without the support of development agencies.

Politics and Development in Burkina Faso

The coup of 4 August 1983 which brought the late Captain Thomas Sankara to power marked a turning point in the history of that country. The new government's commitment to socio-economic and political transformation (especially in the capital Ouagadougou) surpassed that of previous governments. Fifteen months after the Conseil National Revolution (CNR) came to power, a total of 334 primary schools, 284 clinics and maternities, 78 drug stores, 28 retail shops and 553 housing apartments were built, and 258 dams/reservoirs and 962 wells and bore-holes were dug, relying mainly on mass labour mobilisation. The mobilisation effort was frequently presented in military language – 'operation Alpha Commando' (the literacy campaign), 'the rail battle' (the attempt to link Ouagadougou with the manganese rich town of Tambao in the north), 'the battle of Kompienga' (the hydro-electric project),
and implemented with military-style haste. The rate at which such infrastructure was constructed reflected a combination of popular enthusiasm and an element of coercion. These attempts at radical socio-economic transformation were remarkable not because of the nature of the projects *per se* but rather the determination of the leadership to transform society. Such determination arose from the conviction of the new leadership that something dramatic had to be done to move the country out of its unenviable status of being one of the poorest countries in the world (EIU, 1995/96). The emphasis then was on self-reliance and self-dignity for transformation.

Burkina Faso, however, remained poor. GNP per capita as of 1990 stood at $330, having grown at only 1.3% since 1965. The external public debt – only $21 million in 1979 – rose to $496 million by 1985. Burkina Faso's debt has continued to increase over the last decade reaching $1.14 billion in 1993 (EIU, 1995/96). Trade and budget deficits appear to be a permanent structural feature of the country's economy. External trade has been in the red since the 1970s worsening between 1981-85, with export earnings covering only 23% of import needs. Despite austerity measures introduced in 1983, the budget deficit rose to 7 billion FCFA (about $1.3 million) in 1985. Between 1994 and 1995, the overall trade deficit rose from FCFA 73 billion (about $13.5 million) to FCFA 92 billion (about $17 million). The limited revenue base of Burkina Faso has affected the capacity of the state to undertake investment in infrastructure, a necessary condition for promoting development. As a result, with the exception of major towns, the countryside still lacks the basic socio-economic infrastructure needed to enhance livelihood security.

Agriculture (cereal and cotton cultivation, as well as livestock rearing) is the backbone of the national economy, supplemented by income from migrant labour in neighbouring countries, especially the Ivory Coast. It provides employment and revenue for 90 per cent of the population; 6.3 per cent of the total population is engaged in livestock rearing. Between 1985-1990, the livestock sector contributed 8.5 per cent to GNP. The contribution of the primary sector as a whole to GNP was estimated at 31.5 per cent for the period from 1985 to 1990. Though slight increases in cereal production are recorded in certain years (5.4 per cent in 1985/86 and 3.4 per cent in 1988), persistent food deficits characterise Burkina Faso's agricultural system. The cereal harvest of the 1995/96 farming season was estimated at 2.31m tons, as against 2.63m tons for the preceding farming season. The FAO estimated that about 700,000 people faced the threat of hunger. As a result, the government issued an international appeal for 24,000 tons of food aid (EIU, 1995/96). Burkina Faso is one of the countries in the Sahel region of Africa generally regarded as vulnerable to famine. It is to alleviate the problems of poor socio-economic infrastructure, food and livelihood security that most NGOs have intervened in Burkina Faso. Their presence is most evident in the north of the country, the zone considered by external agencies as being most threatened.

The Sankara years: Grassroots Mobilisation for Development

The Sankara years are best remembered for the efforts at grassroots mobilisation. These were 'popularly' associated with the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs). CDRs were to be organs of people's power as well as local representatives of the CNR in all sectors of national life. The tasks of the CDRs included organising the people to promote *local development* as well as to participate in the decision-making process. CDRs which were presented as organs to facilitate the transfer of power to the peasantry were eventually abolished without any resistance from the countryside.
Whilst CDRs are not fondly remembered by many Burkinabe, the impact of this attempt at mass mobilisation for development purposes has been long lasting. The institutionalisation of CDRs did for the first time challenge all previous forms of political authority (including traditional power structures) encouraging the peasantry to organise themselves more actively in order to promote their own interests. In rural areas where the leadership of CDRs teamed up with the leadership of VGs the level of socio-economic development was significant. This showed the progress that can be made when groups simultaneously take action to improve their material well being and influence political decision making. Rural institutions attracted considerable attention especially because the CNR declared as its political objective the empowerment of the peasantry with a view to making it the source of political power.

The legacy of the Sankara era has played an important part in current efforts by VGs to improve their well-being. The experience highlighted the importance of organised collective action and mass mobilisation in social transformation. It showed too that such action could help vulnerable strata overcome constraints within the natural and socio-economic environment which their normal coping strategies were inadequate or incapable of dealing with.

Officially, the political will to involve the peasantry more actively in the development process and political decision making has remained unchanged. The government of Capt. Blaise Compaoré reaffirmed in 1990 that peasants were not merely key players in the drive towards attaining food self-sufficiency, but were expected to become the bedrock of political power. Despite an end to the mass mobilisation efforts of the Sankara era, attempts are being made under the new constitutional dispensation to involve the masses in political decision making. A study commissioned by Burkina Faso’s National Commission for Decentralisation examined the potential role (in decentralised development) of grassroots organisations for development (VGs and their Unions/Federations), traditional and religious structures, local government structures and civil society (Trade Unions and associations) (Guissou, 1995). The aim was to explore how the above could work together in furtherance of decentralised development. Since that study, a serious attempt has been made to translate political intentions into reality. A process of political decentralisation has begun, aimed at involving local communities and their organisations in economic and political development at grassroots level (EIU, 1996). In Burkina Faso, just like in Mali, local development organisations have embraced this development in the hope that it will make a difference to the lives of rural people.

The process of decentralisation has advanced furthest in the political sphere (especially in towns) with the election of about 33 municipal authorities. This process of political decentralisation will extend to Burkina Faso’s 8,000 villages when questions of village border demarcation are sorted out. So far, the attitude among Burkinabe and development organisations towards decentralisation is positive. Nevertheless, critics point out that it is little more than decentralising the political responsibility for development (or rather impoverishment) from the ruling elite to an impoverished peasantry. Until economic power is decentralised and adequate resources made available to decentralised bodies, the dreams of decentralised development could turn into a nightmare. They point out, and rightly too, that the very areas which are marginalised are the ones most incapable of generating enough resources to support the development of their own areas. They ask: will the dominant social class which is so dependent on international capital and the state for its social reproduction willingly relinquish control over the resources so essential for their survival?
Against a context where dominant social classes have the political power to appropriate to themselves a disproportionate share of national resources, decentralisation is unlikely to translate into an improved material well-being of the poor and politically marginalised majority. Perhaps, what has excited many local NGOs in Burkina Faso is the increasing concern of multilateral agencies to channel resources directly to decentralised structures. It is however worth pointing out that the record of multilateral agencies and decentralised or regional development in Burkina Faso is not impressive. Although the context, character and content of current decentralisation efforts is different, external agencies have in the past carved up Burkina Faso in the name of promoting development. It is worth looking at that record if current interest in supporting more closely local level development is to avoid a similar fate.

International Aid and Village Level Organisations

The Early Post-independence Period

Burkina society is traditionally one of active social organisation and mobilisation for different social purposes. It is this feature which inspired Bernard Leleda Ouedraogo to form the international NGO ‘Six S’ movement and its network of village level organisations known in Burkina Faso as the Groupements Naam. Despite the use of a local name, Groupements Naam are essentially Village Groups. VGs owe their origins to French colonial intervention which encouraged their formation as some form of rural co-operatives. The first ‘co-operatives’ established at village level were called ‘Native Providence Societies for Agricultural Loans and Aid’ (Sociétés Indigènes des prévoyance, de secours et de prêts mutuels agricoles – SIPs). SIPs were first started in Algeria and concentrated initially on the organisation of food silos. The motive for creating them (as some sort of co-operatives) was ostensibly to promote food security and general development.

The evolution of VGs in Burkina Faso is closely linked to international external and attempts to promote co-operative development. ‘Cooperatives’ became part of the rural development strategy of post-colonial governments, under the overall direction of Regional Development Organisations (ORDs). ORDs were originally formulated within the framework of the 1963-67 development plan of the first independence government of Maurice Yameogo primarily under the pressure of international agencies. A decentralised institutional structure was considered important for planning and executing development projects. The country was divided into 11 regional development areas with ORDs in each region responsible for promoting development. The promotion of regional development in general and cooperatives in particular was assigned to four foreign agencies. These were SATEC (the Company for Technical Assistance and Cooperation), BDPA (Office for the Development of Agricultural Production), CFDT (French Textile Development Company) and CIDR (International Company for Rural Development).

SATEC was established in 1961 (shortly before ORDs were created) and continued till 1966. It took responsibility for the largest zone, the Mossi plateau including Koudougou and Ouagadougou. The objective of SATEC was to promote animal traction through the provision of credit to selected farmers. The functions of VGs included selling consumer goods and marketing agricultural produce. They served as a channel for introducing new production methods through the collective fields that had been set aside for these groups in their respective villages. They also facilitated the provision of credit and were seen as necessary to ensure repayment. Village
cooperative groups were usually formed by extension agents parading the villages and asking farmers to form cooperatives. The message given to farmers was that if they wanted any agricultural equipment or an avenue to market their produce, it was mandatory for them to join a cooperative group. Local farmers therefore saw the formation and involvement with these state initiated VGs as a short term mechanism for obtaining quick agricultural credit.

Thirty-two village cooperative groups were initially set up with a total membership of 453 and a capital of 514,000 FCFA paid into the National Development Bank (BILLIOND). This constituted a basis for the bank’s provision of 4,800,000 FCFA worth of credit to VG members. By 1966, SATEC had established a total of 545 VGs with a total membership of 13,705. SATEC’s operations initially appeared successful because repayment rates were seen as an important criteria for identifying successful groups. Repayments within the first two years were remarkably high. This impressive start masked the failure of the strategy of promoting grassroots development through a significant injection of credit. By 1965, mid-year repayments amounted to only 54.77%. Bad debts which stood at 5.3% at the beginning of the programme reached 35.2% by 1966. Between 1962 and 1966, 80% of VGs set up had ceased to function. Meanwhile, farmers were expected to reimburse credits obtained. There were cases where law enforcement agents were called in to ensure repayment. Many households were compelled to sell off assets (including productive ones) in order to pay off unsolicited ‘credit’. Their dream of solving their problems (including social ones) with what they considered their legitimate share of the ‘whiteman’s’ money had turned into a nightmare (de Wilde, 1967).

BDPA had a similar objective to SATEC, but their area of operation was the Yatenga region in the north of Burkina Faso. Although their declared intention was the improvement of the system of production through soil improvement and protection measures, these measures were essentially a failure. This was because local people were not consulted or involved, and did not share foreign agronomists’ approach to solving the problem of soil erosion. CFDT whose primary interests are in the textile industry, took responsibility for the areas of the country with cotton growing potential. The basic thrust of its policy was the promotion of cotton cultivation through cooperative structures. They were to be avenues through which inputs could be supplied, and which could guarantee the supply of specific quantities of raw cotton.

There are a number of lessons which emerge from this early experience. The experience shows the extent to which groups quickly form in order to take advantage of opportunities in their external environment, disintegrating as soon as that objective has been met. It shows too that credit or financial support does not necessarily facilitate organisational development. On the contrary, it can undermine the ability of rural communities to organise in order to solve their own problems. This early experience draws attention to the dangers of using credit or financial resources as a primary vehicle for promoting development. Even when a developmental use of credit is accepted in principle, it is difficult to enforce in practice. Perhaps, financial services should stand on their own but tailored to meet the varied needs of poorer strata of society. To explore further whether any of the these lessons have been learnt, we turn to the next section.
VGs in the Post-famine Period

Although VGs have their roots in French colonial intervention in the region, their character and role has changed significantly since the coup of 1983. Unlike before when rural communities were coerced or induced into forming groups, many villages are now independently organising to resolve their problems which threaten their livelihood. The relationship between VGs and international agencies was essentially mediated by the state and its parastatal structures created to meet the demands of international aid. However, since the drought and famine of the 1970s, the state has ceded its monopoly over rural organisations to a motley of NGOs, the majority of whom owe their existence to international aid. In the province of Yatenga, there are estimated to be about 20 NGOs directly financed by northern aid agencies. The financial contributions by Northern NGOs to the Burkina Faso national economy have become an important source of foreign earnings even if not channelled to the national treasury. In 1986, NGOs contributions of $20,244,000 (about 5.7 billion FCFA) constituted 8.5% of total external assistance estimated at $238,838,000 (about 66.8 billion FCFA). In 1987, this rose to $33,020,00 (about 9.2 billion FCFA), that is 15.1% of total external assistance of $218,441,000. NGO total contribution for the period 1986-1990 was estimated at 34.7 billion FCFA.

There is no doubt that the legacy of the pre-colonial and early post-colonial attempts at promoting grassroots development is still visible in many areas of Burkina Faso. In this context, the massive influx of international agencies into Burkina Faso has been a mixed blessing. There are still many VGs (or rather their leaders) who see such village organisations as primarily an attempt to get their share of the aid. However, the impact of the Sankara years as well as the activities of some NGOs has contributed to increasing the momentum of autonomous community based organisation (CBOs). There are now many CBOs initiated independently by local people themselves to redress their own problems. Many such groups do not receive external financial support and are usually not supervised or covered by extension agents of external NGOs or government services. These groups are usually rooted within the traditional social fabric of rural society and tend to be ignored by NGOs. There are also independently initiated VGs who, though may receive some occasional external support, are essentially driven by their own agenda and are dependent primarily on their own resources. Such groups usually involve the elite in each community. Many groups have however developed as a result of initiatives undertaken by well structured NGOs with access to foreign financial assistance and support. This diverse background makes it difficult to ascertain the exact number and define precisely the character of Village Groups. It also makes any sweeping generalisations about their contribution to rural development efforts unwarranted.

The exact number, membership and activities of Village Groups in Burkina Faso is yet to be accurately determined. Village Groups were said to number between 828 and 1,666 in 1979 with a total membership of between 21,427 and 39,690. This varies markedly from the figure of 3,584 Village Groups identified in 1979, as recorded by the National Institute of Statistics and Demography (INSD). In 1987, there were estimated to be 5,893 Village Groups whilst the five year development plan, 1991-95, estimated that as of 1989, there were a total of 147,756 Village Groups. The wide variations in the number of Village Groups in Burkina Faso is not only due to a difficulty in obtaining accurate figures for these groups. It reflects the conceptual difficulties in defining exactly what a Village Group is, as well as the rapid increase in the number of these groups, many of which have not had official recognition.
The role of foreign financial assistance and support in ensuring the continued functioning of some of these groups and the long term impact on their development is one that cannot be glossed over. Though local groups and organisations are often presented as partners in development with external financiers, the dividing line between dependence and partnership is quite thin especially when one partner is mainly a giver of financial aid and the other the recipient.

To explore further the issue of partnership or dependence, we examine the experiences of two UK based NGOs in grassroots development and village group organisation. In the process, we revisit the links between international aid, NGOs and local initiatives and draw attention to inherent dangers of this relationship.

NGOs and Grassroots Development

Oxfam-UK/Eire’s ex-Agro-Forestry Project (PAF)

PAF was initiated in 1979 by Oxfam-UK/Eire first as a research project but by 1982, it had developed into a full blown development project helping farmers to conserve, protect and develop their natural resource potential. PAF is credited with being the first to start popularising the use of a simple instrument, the water tube, for determining contour lines crucial in making a traditional practice of lining up stones more effective in conserving the soil. Soil and water conservation techniques, especially the practice of constructing stone lines along the contour (diguettes) have made an important contribution towards halting the process of environmental degradation. Since its inception, PAF has operated in about 400 villages, developed about 10,000 hectares of degraded land and trained about 5,000 farmers in soil and water conservation techniques and natural resource management.

Diguettes, as they are popularly called, have become a permanent feature of the rural landscape of the Mossi plateau. Their popularity is linked to their proven effectiveness in soil and water conservation. The results of an investigation conducted as part of an Oxfam-UK/Eire commissioned study on PAF showed that 99% and 98% of respondents (out of a total sample of 1,209 household heads) in Pilot and Test villages (Endnote 2) reported observing an increase in natural plant regeneration in the area. A similar percentage acknowledged that the water harvesting technique did increase crop yields. The study, however, found that only 17% and 10% of farmers in pilot and test villages respectively had constructed diguettes on all their farmland as against 11% and 17% in pilot and test villages respectively who had not implemented the water harvesting technique on any of their fields (Atampugre, 1993). This low adoption rate is related to a declining availability of stones and the cost of diguette construction. Only rich farmers with access to transport are able to mobilise stones from long distances and organise construction. It is they who are in a position to take advantage independently of what is undoubtedly an effective soil and water conservation technique. Yet diguettes are effective only if there is rainfall. Even then unless supported with soil nutrients such as animal manure, diguettes are unlikely to make a significant difference to food security. It is therefore not surprising that despite years of diguette construction, Burkina Faso will continue to have recourse to international food aid during periods of severe cereal deficits.

PAF had for sometime seen its comparative advantage in its approach to development intervention. Its emphasis was on modest scale initiatives and priority was given to co-operating with state and parastatal agencies operating in the province. The project claimed to be involved in a process of constant learning in
conjunction with the VGs and communities it worked with. Its approach was to allow practical solutions to evolve from the beneficiaries. The essential objective was to strengthen grassroots institutional capacity to understand and assume responsibility for finding solutions to rural problems. Such a process involves helping people to investigate the causes and consequences of environmental degradation, identifying the most sustainable way for natural resources to be exploited, and training farmers in new skills.

When in 1993 this writer conducted a study on this project it was difficult to find evidence to substantiate PAF’s claimed comparative advantage, drawing attention to the difficulty the project had in proving its participatory credentials. The ability of the team to work closely with local communities and their organisations, their responsiveness to the priorities of the people they worked with and for, was not in doubt. However, it was evident then that local communities did not feel they owned the project. The absence of institutional mechanisms by which those whom the project was intended to benefit could shape and manage the project was raised as an important weakness. It was suggested that representatives of VGs could be mandated and supported to assume responsibility for running and supervising the activities of the project. In a way, this would constitute a useful approach to strengthening the capacity of local groups to continue with the work that had been done. Such a process would facilitate the termination of Oxfam-UK/Eire’s financial commitment and managerial responsibility over the project.

In April 1996, Oxfam-UK/Eire officially terminated its responsibility for the project. The parting of ways has not been an easy process for the PAF team and Oxfam-UK/Eire field staff. The process of disengagement which was started as far as back as 1991 was designed to make it possible for the project to continue long after Oxfam-UK/Eire had withdrawn. The hope was that a long gestation period would enable the team and their partners at community level to define and develop a new framework for continuing the work undertaken at village level. Yet it is increasingly evident that PAF’s ‘baby’, now renamed ‘ORFA’, is having post-natal problems.

**PAF’s Baby: ORFA**

ORFA was formed by the local PAF team to continue the good work that they had been carrying out in the Yatenga province. Its draft three year programme submitted (in June 1996) to Oxfam-UK/Eire (Ouagadougou) identified its developmental goal as contributing to food security through supporting village organisations to better manage available natural resources and in the process facilitate locally sustainable development. Concretely, it hopes to a) facilitate the emergence of recognised village structures. This will be done by strengthening and adding value to the indigenous capacities and competencies in natural resource management; b) improve the living conditions of rural dwellers in its zones operation. Its priority is to promote maternal health and a diversified source of income for women; c) protect and restore lands through a rational management of natural resources in order to increase exploitable land resources. ORFA plans to identify, choose, organise and train (from among the pool of peasants trained under PAF) a pool of ‘peasant experts’ to support their work on soil and water conservation and the effective management of natural resources.

In identifying its objective as facilitating the emergence of recognised and effective local structures, ORFA are conscious of the existing situation where VGs are very much like those under SATEC. ORFA points out that there are many formal organisations which are in reality facades created by and in the interest of external
aid. 'Currently, there is a dominant tendency towards a multiplicity of VGs doing exactly the same thing in the same village', they argue (ORFA, 1996). And why? Because different external agencies arrive in villages often with contradictory and competitive approaches.

Yet when it comes to ORFA's strategy of overcoming the existing situation, it has so far not outlined in practical terms how their intervention will be different in the areas they intend to work. They talk of better coordination and management of local affairs by an intermediary authorised and recognised by the state and by internal as well as external actors in the village. They have also talked of improving grassroots capacity to: communicate among themselves and external actors; reflect, innovate and act. They mention too the need to strengthen grassroots structures' organisational capacity. In the process, the hope is to contribute to the emergence of local organisations capable of negotiating with external actors on regional development policies and/or methods for financing local development.

There is no doubt that these are worthy intentions. However, the key question which needs to be asked is, whose intentions are they? As the Oxfam-UK/Eire team in Ouagadougou have themselves pointed out to ORFA, Oxfam-UK/Eire is not clear if the new organisation intends to be an intermediary implementing agency (very much as it has always been) or a support structure to local organisations. If it is the latter, then peasant organisations themselves must take responsibility for their own programmes including the search for and management of financial resources. It is these organisations themselves who have to decide when and from whom it asks for support.

ORFA's main difficulty is how to move away from being an implementor to a facilitator and supporter. The latter role will entail fewer staff and a smaller budget. ORFA's difficulty is the more surprising since some VGs in its zone of intervention have already set up a coordinating committee and drawn up a three year programme (written in their own language) which defines their understanding of food and livelihood security.

In the light of the above, the role that the project’s partners in the respective villages played in the formation of ORFA is still unclear. The governing structure of ORFA include a general assembly made up of registered members as the supreme decision making body. Who these registered members are is still unclear. What is also unclear is whether throughout the long years of PAF's work, organisational seeds have been sown. If they have, did they germinate and are they growing independently of PAF/Oxfam-UK/Eire? If no such seeds were sown during the early days and even lately, then ORFA risks creating the very structures that it criticises as being in the interest of external agencies. Yet it is in a unique position to identify, in its zone of intervention, local people's own organisations. Its members (ex-PAF) know the communities well and have won their confidence and respect. It is around local people's own organisations that ORFA's future lies. If it fails to identify and support such organisations, it will be no different from external agencies who draw up well intentioned and designed programmes (but with little knowledge or roots in local social reality) and budgets entirely based on hopes for external funding. And like many of them, notwithstanding all the nice developmental intentions, a primary concern (though legitimate) is how to cover overhead costs and pay the salaries of staff. And as northern NGOs are fully aware, competing in the open market for a share
of international assistance is an increasingly difficult business. Although northern donors increasingly talk of dealing directly with southern NGOs, they are also sceptical of the booming NGO industry in the south.

The experience of PAF/ORFA raises a number of questions. Why is it that even though there was a long period of preparation, the transition was very difficult? Why is the transition from a northern NGO project to a local NGO so problematic? How can northern agencies undertaking projects in Africa organise their intervention so as to ensure continuity after the formal ending of the project? Before attempting to answer these questions, it is worthwhile to review the experiences of ACORD, a UK based consortium operational in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso. It is important to review that agency’s experience not because Oxfam-UK/Eire is a leading member of the consortium but primarily because ORFA is attempting to replicate ACORD’s experience in the Sahel within its zone of intervention. ORFA hopes that its village organisations will eventually form zonal unions and a federation or network of unions at the regional level.

**ACORD’s Experience in Burkina Faso**

*The context:* ACORD’s intervention in the Sahel region of Burkina Faso began in 1983. The primary objective of the programme was to strengthen men’s and women’s VGs, encourage links between them and facilitate their access to financial and other support from other agencies (Roche, 1992). In engaging with these organisations, the agency was well aware of the historical origins of VGs and the role of external aid in their promotion. A study conducted by ACORD on 524 VGs (both ACORD and non-ACORD supported VGs) spread across the three provinces of the Sahel (Seno, Soum and Oudalan), showed that the majority of these groups were formed under the joint initiative of state extension services and members of village communities to assist in the development of their respective areas.

### Table 1: Formation of Village Groups (VGs) in the Sahel (1984-1989)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative behind groups</th>
<th>Objective behind formation of group</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Receive Aid</th>
<th>Develop Initiatives</th>
<th>Imitate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extension agents</td>
<td></td>
<td>203</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and Villagers</td>
<td></td>
<td>83</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villagers alone</td>
<td></td>
<td>238</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>524</td>
<td>112 VGs</td>
<td>353 VGs</td>
<td>59 VGs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source:* G Jardot (1990), *Les Groupements Villageois du Sahel Burkinabé, Mémoires de fin d'études d'ingénieur des techniques agricoles des régions chaudes*, p.16, Table 5

Out of a total of 524 groups studied, 353 (about 67%) were started primarily out of concern for conditions in the village. Furthermore, 238 groups (45%) were formed through villagers’ own initiative, whilst a further 83 groups (about 16%) came into being through the joint initiative of extension agents and local farmers. Of the groups started by local farmers themselves, 17% said they did so in order to get external aid as compared to 32% of groups started primarily by extension agents. Respondents cited as reasons for their formation, the need to rely on VGs for solutions to some individual farming difficulties (for example inputs); the cultivation of collective farms as a source of seed grain; receiving technical training as well as gaining access to
credit. Other reasons stated were: a recognition of the usefulness of group activities in reducing the burden of daily tasks; enhancing food security by having access to cereals, income or complimentary foods; and the need to resolve the general problems of the village (especially social ones).

**The Strategy:** Between 1983-1990 ACORD’s intervention aimed to increase the skills of state extension services to enable them to better support and motivate VGs and their unions; strengthen the management capacity of these local organisations; assist these VGs and the unions to formulate projects and fund-raise for their implementation; and help them better plan, monitor and evaluate their activities.

In the above process, it was anticipated that an identification of needs and solutions within the capacity of beneficiaries themselves; long term economic sustainability through the provision of loans to organisations on the basis of their motivation and level of organisation; and the promotion of the independence of local organisations (by supporting them to pursue their own agenda) would occur.

ACORD initially worked through state extensions services partly because the character of these services had changed as a result of the political environment under Sankara and partly to create a basis of continued support for these groups. Working through state structures also provided opportunities to influence state policy in general and modalities for funding projects and co-ordinating the work of external agencies. However by 1990 this approach was abandoned in favour of a direct engagement with VGs and their unions. State extension services were no longer the enthusiastic and motivated partners they appeared to be during the Sankara years.

**Achievements:** A study conducted between June and August 1995 examined the process of VG development in the Sahel (Diau, 1995). The focus was on the Unions of VGs who were members of the regional committee of producer groups of the Sahel (CRUS). CRUS was formed in 1990 in response to the serious cereal deficit of the 1989/90 farming season. There was the fear that in the face of the low purchasing power of local communities, an emergency programme was needed to ensure that the cereal deficit did not transform itself into a famine. The unions realised more than ever before the need to pull together to cope with the crisis. CRUS was created to develop an emergency programme which would ensure grain availability to make up for the shortfall, investigate and secure markets for livestock so as to provide communities with the necessary income to purchase grain as well as to identify sources of funding to implement the programme. Since its creation, CRUS has become an important representative of the interests of the farmers of the Sahel. With the assistance of northern NGOs, it successfully lobbied European governments against the ‘dumping’ of European beef on the West African market, a practice which undermines the ability of farmers of the Sahel to sell their cattle in the lucrative Ivory Coast market. CRUS regularly intercedes on behalf of farmers of the Sahel in the Burkinabe parliament and with governments in the sub-region. It is regularly solicited to represent farmers’ interests during international conferences organised by multilateral agencies.

The study identified three main types of unions: zonal or local unions, district unions and provincial unions. There are about 23 zonal or local unions, 15 district unions and 3 provincial unions. The first provincial union, the union of VGs of Oudalan (UGVO) was formed in 1980. The process of unionisation took a step forward in 1982, with the formation of the Union Djamwari of Djibo (a regional union), in 1984 with the formation of the district union of Kelbo, and in 1985 with the formation of the union of

The primary objective of unions has been to improve the living conditions of their members through 1) promoting socio-economic activities (grain and livestock marketing, market gardening, income generating activities at the grassroots level; 2) strengthening the capacity of VGs to develop their activities at inter-village level; 3) representing and defending the interests of grassroots communities; 4) and mobilising and better managing their resources.

So far, these unions and the VGs they represent have contributed to grain availability in the region. The single most important activity they undertake is grain marketing. Whilst grain marketing (often associated with cereal banks) is known to have failed and are often deemed not viable, it is the one activity that some unions carry out most effectively. Such Unions purchase grain internally (and from other provinces if need be) between October and January when most harvest and post-harvest activities would have been completed, and resell them to their members (as well as needy non-members) between May and August, the hungry period (Soudure). Support for grain marketing activities has come from internal and external sources. There are some unions who have received financial support only from CRUS/ACORD. About 5 unions have received help from CRUS/ACORD and CNCA (a para-statal agency for providing agricultural credit), very often at a negotiable interest rate of between 10% and 20%. In addition to CRUS/ACORD, 8 unions have also received credit from an external NGO Afrique Verte (Green Africa) operational in the area. In addition to CRUS/ACORD, the two strongest unions (UGVA and UGVO) have received support from 10 different agencies (Endnote 3).

The study concluded that the process of unionisation of VGs had been positive. The unions had provided a framework for discussions among leaders of VGs on the major socio-economic concerns of their communities. Adult literacy in different local languages, and a wide range of training or skills transfer had benefited many producers in the area, thereby increasing their capacity to carry out their activities. Furthermore, the organisational capacity to undertake specific activities, especially in the marketing of grain, is fairly well developed in the area, thanks to the activities of these unions. Also, certain unions are actively undertaking livestock marketing. Equally significant is the increasing (though still limited) involvement of women in union activities.

There are probably no other areas in Burkina Faso where grain merchants do not have the monopoly over cereal provision. Before the intervention of these unions, grain merchants in the north of the country exported grain to neighbouring Mali and were making supernormal profits from exorbitant grain prices, a factor which lay at the heart of the famine of the 1970s. During the famine years, although grain was available in the zone, few households could afford the high grain prices. The value of their most important asset (livestock) had depreciated enormously due to widespread loss of their animals. Thanks to the activities of these unions, households in the area (and particularly poorer ones) now gain access to grain, at affordable prices, from the warehouses of their VGs and unions. The effective control of grain marketing, coupled with an increasing potential for the sale of livestock arising from the devaluation of the FCFA has ensured that areas like the province of Oudalan are unlikely to experience a famine on the scale they experienced in previous times.
Despite the achievements mentioned above, cereal deficits and limited purchasing power continue to be major preoccupations of households in the area. The study also found that only two unions had reached a stage where they did not need support in terms of management and organisational skills. These are probably the best in the whole of Burkina Faso given the volume of activities they undertake and their capacity to manage them. The UGVO (regional union) and UGVA (district union) were the only unions who completely financed their literacy classes and training for their members from their own resources. They were the only ones effectively supporting activities of direct benefit to women – livestock fanning, textile weaving and mat-making, market gardening and cereal purchase. These two unions have a clear capacity to plan, implement, monitor and report on their activities. The UGVA, for example, demonstrates a high level of effectiveness in the way they plan and execute their grain marketing activities. With a revolving fund of 6 million FCFA (of about £7,000 or £14,000 prior to the devaluation of the FCFA in January 1994) and considerable skills in bookkeeping and reporting of progress of their work to their members, it can be argued that the union is making an important contribution to the welfare of their members. This capacity has developed from a combination of factors: the quality of the leadership (some of whom are literate) and their commitment to the union, the skills transfer carried out by ACORD and other members of the consortium (Oxfam-UK/Eire, Novib), the close working relationship they had with state extension workers.

Beyond these two unions, eight other unions were moderately strong in the sense that they had an acceptable level of management capacity but still needed some support and 16 unions of varying capacities but generally quite weak. Some of the characteristics of the moderate unions were: on the positive side – a relatively democratic distribution of power, reasonably well executed activities, relatively cohesive leadership and a relatively good reporting system; and, on the negative side – a rather informal management system (very limited documentation), inadequate flow of information and a lower level of motivation. In the case of weak unions, many of them were non-functional. An important factor in their continued ‘existence’ was the expectation of some external assistance.

As ACORD ends its involvement with CRUS, it is increasingly clear that whilst there is a lot that the agency can be proud of, CRUS is as dependent as ever on external assistance for its effective survival. Its support base within the unions is not that strong considering the extent to which it relies on ACORD to carry out its activities. Perhaps, it is worth asking whether developing and sustaining an apex organisation is necessarily always a desirable strategy of institutional strengthening especially when its timing does not coincide with the ability of grassroots organisations own ability to sustain and support the functioning of their apex organisation. There needs to be and in-depth study of ACORD’s experience if we are to find answers to the question why some unions developed better than others.

Granted that not only the UGVA and UGVO have received considerable external assistance, what factors have made these two unions more successful in using the resources channelled to them. Preliminary discussions (by this writer) on the subject held in 1994 with leaders of the UGVA suggests that the character (especially integrity and transparency) of the leadership, their social class position (mainly middle level peasants) and their experiences as migrant workers were factors which made them determined to make the best out of their lot. They explained how they recognise that with declining opportunities for wage labour in neighbouring countries, they do have their backs to the wall. A recent study commissioned by ACORD has suggested that
the quality of leadership, the beneficial impact of the activities of VGs and Unions, the
degree of involvement of members in the activities of the organisation as well as the
support of external partners are the most important factors which explain the uneven
development of VGs and Unions. Yet this still does not explain why VGs and Unions
operating within the same socio-cultural context develop differently. Why is the level
of development of the UGVA and UGVO so significantly higher than the other
Unions? It is perhaps safe to conclude that the success of some unions is due to a
combination of factors, including different historical experiences of villages and
significant external agency support, which requires empirical investigation. In the
section below, we draw some preliminary general conclusions on ACORD's
experience.

Lessons: ACORD's decision to work through state structures necessarily led it to
work with VGs. It was therefore spared the possibility of creating new forms of
organisation. This is not necessarily an endorsement of working through state
structures. As explained earlier, it was the character of the Burkina state under
Sankara, especially the preparedness of many state extension agents to see themselves
as defenders of rural people's interests, which made ACORD's approach at the time
an appropriate one. Irrespective of the above explanation, an important lesson is that
external agencies seeking to promote lasting development should identify and work
with local organisations which already exist (despite their limitations) and are owned
by or have a potential to be appropriated by local communities. After all, Sankara's
CDRs had a short life primarily because they were imposed from the top, many got
very quickly hijacked by the 'lumpen' peasantry (Endnote 4) and were never really
owned by the majority of rural dwellers.

Promoting the relative autonomy of local partners has emerged as an important
element in ensuring the sustainability of local organisations. ACORD's strategy
encouraged VGs to develop direct links with state and external agencies. It supported
them in their dealings with different donors. The varied nature of this support has
compelled unions to define their own terms for accepting assistance or relating with
other agencies. For example, the UGVA allegedly decided to refuse assistance from
Afrique Verte because they were unhappy with the conditions attached to that
agency's assistance.

Debt is the other side of credit, and 'aid' can 'kill' even when it is well intended. The
history of aid and grassroots organisations discussed earlier indicate that external
assistance is beneficial only under certain circumstances. The massive influx of
external agencies into northern Burkina Faso and the tendency towards a lavish
infusion of resources has in many cases thwarted the development of local
organisations. As one villager explained, 'a white woman came and told us that if we
formed a VG, she would give us some money' (Twose, 1986). Over the years the
importance of matching resource flows with the absorptive and management capacity
of local organisations has emerged as a crucial element in enhancing the performance
of grassroots organisations. Yet paradoxically, this very often runs counter to the
growth needs of the NGO industry. Institutional strengthening often does not entail a
huge financial input. Yet unless NGOs are unable to cover headquarters overhead
costs, they cannot remain operational.

In general terms, the Burkina Faso state has not sought to subjugate grassroots
organisations to national political power or the agenda of ruling political elite. Village
communities have been relatively free and indeed have been encouraged to organise
to promote the interests of their respective communities. Such relative freedom has
created a conducive socio-political environment for the development of grassroots organisations.

Finally, ACORD’s experience has shown that it is only activities which respond to the pressing and lasting priorities of rural communities which are sustainable. It is around such needs that viable grassroots organisations can develop. The most important indicator of strong unions is their mastery of the grain trade. It is an area where local unions of VGs do not have much to learn from outside agencies. The ability of strong unions to plan and execute grain purchases and marketing is remarkable. It is their mastery of this activity, fundamental to food security in the area, which has contributed to their strength and enabled them undertake other activities.

**Conclusion**

What are the similarities and differences between the two agencies as they end their operational involvement? Oxfam’s intervention was direct, focusing on technical innovation within the province of Yatenga whilst that of ACORD was primarily providing training, support and advice to VGs in the Sahel provinces of Burkina through state extension services. Despite these differences, both agencies have similar experiences when it comes to ending their formal involvement. With ACORD just as with Oxfam, the decision to part ways has been the decision of the two agencies. Neither CRUS, the unions and VGs (in the case of ACORD) and PAF staff and their local partners (in the case of Oxfam) were prepared to accept that they were mature enough to go it on their own. On the contrary, their tendency has been to underplay their achievements so as to justify the continued involvement of ACORD and Oxfam. Furthermore, the exit strategy is similar in both cases: develop a local structure (CRUS in the case of ACORD and ORFA in the case of Oxfam) to continue to do what these northern agencies were doing.

The most important issue raised particularly by the PAF-ORFA experience is the transition from an operational project into a local NGO. This transition is made difficult by the very nature of operational projects. By engaging staff initially on salaries which cannot be supported by local communities, local NGOs like ORFA face the difficult situation of having to see their skilled team members moving on to other external agencies in order to maintain their standards of living. After all, charity begins at home. The above situation can be avoided if the transformation into a local NGO is part of the strategy of intervention and monitored throughout the life of the initial project. Such a strategy must avoid a large staffing structure and high recurrent costs, gradually involve its partners in the management of the project and work out a strategy of devolving responsibility for the financial survival of the project to its partners. Identifying and working with or through local partners be part of the initial operational strategy. And in collaborating with such partners, the relationship should be built around a constant dialogue relating to their vision of themselves and their society’s future, and a preparedness to support them in practical terms when the need arises. In so doing, the challenge then is how to enhance the potential of grassroots organisations without increasing their dependence on international aid. This will not happen unless leaders of grassroots organisations have their own vision and are prepared to exploit opportunities in their environment which advance their own interests.
Nicholas Atampugre is the author of *Behind the Lines of Stone: The Social Impact of a Soil and Water Conservation Project in the Sahel* (Oxfam-Publications) and currently a research officer with ACORD, an international NGO.

Endnotes

1. CBOs are primarily membership organisations at community level, engaged in activities designed to bring benefit to their members and their communities. Local NGOs refer to non-membership organisations who act on behalf or seek to promote the interests of a particular constituency.

2. Pilot villages: villages where the project focused its activity; test villages, i.e. where the project has had no involvement, scaled down or terminated its activities.

3. ACCIR, PSB (the Netherlands), Coopérative Aquarum (France), Association Echange et Tiers Mondiste, FEER, CNCA, OXFAM-UK/EIRE-UK, DWHH, LEBEL (Bureau d’étude et de liaison) and NOVIB (only to UGVA).

4. Rural youth (often part-time farmers part traders) in the process of rebelling against traditional hierarchy of authority. Many had no traditional legitimacy and acquired their new status mainly as storm troopers of the regime.

References


"To Seek Happiness": Development in a West African Village in the Era of Democratisation

Lars Rudebeck

This article examines what democracy means to a people who have no direct word for it in their own language. It sets one village’s experience of Guinea-Bissau’s first multi-party elections in the historic context of the struggle for independence, the failures of the one-party state, the difficulties caused by structural adjustment. It sets this experience against theories of democracy as an ideal or as sets of formal arrangements and argues that whilst the latter may have been successfully implemented, democracy will be poorly rooted unless it leads to palpable socio-economic progress. There are still many problems to be overcome, not least with the lack of resources available to the state, before this is likely to be achieved. This article follows others by Rudebeck: ‘Kandjadja, Guinea-Bissau, 1976-1986: Observations on the Political Economy of an African village’ (ROAPE No. 41) and ‘The Effects of Structural Adjustment in Kandjadja, Guinea-Bissau’ (ROAPE No. 49) – which have sought to understand the impact of wider political and economic forces on this one village over time. This article is a continuation of that story.

Democracy and Development in Kandjadja

On the 19th of March 1996 I took part in a meeting lasting for several hours with some hundred inhabitants of the village of Kandjadja and neighbouring villages in northern Guinea-Bissau. The meeting had been called by the local representative of the African non-governmental organisation RADI (Réseau Africain pour le Développement Intégré see Endnote 1), in order for the local people to discuss with me how they perceived the recent democratisation of Guinea-Bissau. The discussion was lively, both young and old, men and women, took active part. One authoritative participant pointed out that it was difficult to express the concept of democracy in Mandinga, the dominant language around Kandjadja, which the people of that area share with millions of people in West Africa, far beyond the frontiers of Guinea-Bissau. He and the person interpreting from Mandinga into Portuguese and Creole agreed that the closest they could come in Portuguese was: ‘to seek happiness’ (buscar a felicidade).

‘To seek happiness’ is a widely inclusive definition of democracy and democratisation. Its thrust is universal. Its sense converges with ‘development’. In the context where it was offered, I interpreted it to be about human dignity, justice, and common efforts for common purposes. Like many other definitions of democracy, the point of departure for this one is a notion of the good society. Quite possibly, the answer
would have been the same, had a definition of development been asked for. But in order to be able to distinguish democracy as a form of rule from other forms of rule, we need a more specific definition, one that focuses on ways of ruling societies. Could such a definition be universal at the same time? It would be unwise to rule out the possibility.

One way of defining democracy – as an abstract idea and ideal with a universal thrust – is as follows: a form of rule which guarantees equal shares in the exercise of power within a given society to all adult citizens and which respects simultaneously the integrity of minority groups and individuals. Democratisation would then be a process bringing a society closer to such an ideal state. This makes abstract sense. But concretely it does not say much.

It is possible also to state, as most political scientists do, that democracy is a form of rule incorporating universal adult suffrage, regular elections, the legally recognised freedoms of speech, association and organisation, and justice bound by law. Democratisation, then, would be change in the direction of this. From such a definition we may proceed to study, both how democratic rule emerges and functions in real life, and to investigate, in an historical/sociological perspective, what conditions favour it or do not favour it. This is my own mode of work in the present case study.

The ideal type definition and the conventional political science definition of democracy are different from each other, but not opposed. The political science definition is more limited, a kind of operationalisation of the ideal type. It concentrates upon a small number of institutions which, historically, have been central in forms of rule approximating in reality more ideal notions of equal exercise of power. In practice this means that so-called Western democracy is the point of departure for the political science definition of democracy. To people and countries having been subjected to colonial dictatorship by Western states this may seem very contradictory – which it also is. Still, historically, it is incontrovertibly true that democracy as a form of rule emerged first in the same part of the world which also colonised the so-called third world.

The contradictory aspect of this can be overcome with the help of the ideal-type definition, as this catches the universal dimension of the notion of democracy: the longing most people have for rule based on justice and human dignity. The political science definition can then be seen as an attempt to specify, credibly and realistically, on the basis of historical experience, the institutional implications of such rule.

Besides what has already been said, historical experience also tells us that state rule incorporating universal adult suffrage, regular elections, the freedoms of speech, association and organisation, and justice bound by law, can hardly be consolidated and sustained for longer periods without a measure of popular influence and social justice in society as a whole. This goes to say that both democratic constitutionalism and a measure of popular sovereignty in society as a whole, beyond the constitutionally defined political system (Rudebek, Törnquist & Rojas, 1996:219-229), are required for democracy as a form of rule to become legitimate and enduring.

Constitutionalism as rule by law, without democracy, has existed for centuries in the Western historical experience. But the democratisation of constitutionalism by universal suffrage and civil rights for all is a recent outcome of growing popular influence and power in society. In recent processes of democratisation in the so-called third world, the two basic components of the process have occurred in almost reverse order. There the democratic aspects of constitutionalism have been introduced from
above, despite the fact that society as a whole has been marked by very limited popular sovereignty. Therefore democracy is still weekly rooted in most of these countries. The case of Guinea-Bissau offers an illuminative example.

For a concept such as democracy to be concretised and applied in practice, it must be linked to the historical roots and cultural notions of each society where it is applied. Even if it is true that the history of democratic theory offers a wide variety of concepts (Held, 1992:10-39), this does not go to say that any form of rule can justifiably be called democratic, as long as it fits in with the culture of a particular society. It does mean, however, that the abstract institutions in question must be brought to life in the contexts where they are meant to function in order for democracy to become legitimate and sustainable.

In analogous fashion, the following observations are about conditions for this to happen, as seen from a local West African perspective. It will be obvious that development and democracy, in this perspective, are closely intertwined. The presentation is part of a diachronic effort to study links between democracy and development through the prism of the village of Kandjadja ever since the 1970s (Rudebeck, 1988:17-29; 1990: 34-51).

The Village of Kandjadja
Kandjadja is one of tens of thousands of similar villages in rural Africa. It has around one thousand inhabitants (730 according to the census of 1979) and is the central village of a section comprising also fourteen other smaller villages. The section as a whole probably has somewhat less than three thousand inhabitants. It is situated in the administrative sector of Mansabá, region of Oio, northern Guinea-Bissau. This is ancient West African land, where Mandinga people of Muslim faith lived as farmers and traders long before Portuguese sailors first set foot on the Guinean coast around the middle of the fifteenth century, and where they still live. The distance to Bissau, the capital city, is about one hundred and twenty kilometres, including eleven kilometres of track road through the forest, leading up to the main road. The great majority of the people are Mandinga, but people of the Balanta and Fula ethnic groups also live in the section.

The livelihood of the people is based on agriculture in a wide sense, as well as on earnings by migrants who have left for Bissau and abroad. In recent years, cashew-nuts have taken the place of groundnuts as the major local source of cash income. Sometimes other products, such as for instance onions, are also hauled all the way to the market in Bissau by some enterprising individual. Materially the village subsists and survives. So far there are only limited signs of economic improvement during the last twenty years. My 1990 article on structural adjustment in Kandjadja ended on the following note:

It seems clear enough from my observations that structural adjustment so far, has brought little concrete reason to hope for a better future in Kandjadja. On the other hand, it is true also that cracks are appearing in the wall of stagnation, economically as well as politically.

The young men of the village continue to travel widely and more freely now. Some women follow. Political hopes and illusions are dying, state power is losing its legitimacy. People turn to their historical roots and proven experiences for survival and consolation. But what they find does not fill the void of the present. New cracks will open. Through them new alliances, new bases of legitimacy, may appear.
Three Periods in the Development of Guinea-Bissau

Until the first democratic, multi-party, parliamentary and presidential elections were held in Guinea-Bissau in 1994, there had been two clearly distinguishable periods in the post-colonial politico-economic history of the country. The first period ran from independence in 1974 till around 1982. It was marked by one-party rule and attempts at socialist inspired planning. The second period was that of liberalisation. This ran from 1982. But until 1990, liberalisation touched only the economy and not political life. Under the umbrella of established one-party rule, the economy was adjusted according to World Bank and IMF prescriptions.

Today, however, over two years after the elections of 1994, it is natural instead to see the year 1990 as the starting point for a third period, that of democratisation, in the midst of which Guinea-Bissau still finds itself. During this third period, economic liberalisation has continued, but it has been supplemented with political liberalisation, quickly turning into democratisation as well. The 1994 election confirmed the process. In the future, we may possibly be able to say that this was the year when Guinea-Bissau passed from the stage of ‘transition’ into that of ‘consolidation’ (Doh Chuli Shin, 1994:135-170; Bangura, 1992:69-104). So far, we can only speculate about the stability and durability of the newly established democratic constitutional system. In any case, the year 1994 marks an important turning point. The institutionalisation of a system with many parties and a government subjected to scrutiny by a legally recognized opposition was begun. After Portuguese colonialism followed by twenty years of one-party independence, this was completely new in the political history of the country. Thus the following three main periods may be distinguished in the politico-economic history of independent Guinea-Bissau: 1) Socialist inspired state planning and one-party rule 1974-1982; 2) Economic liberalisation and one-party rule 1982-1990; 3) Political liberalisation and democratisation, 1990 – and under continued economic liberalisation beyond, via 1994.

Broadly speaking, the first two of these periods brought nothing to Kandjadja in terms of such development that the people felt had been promised. What about the third period, the one of democratisation?

The 1994 Elections

After long discussions and several postponements for tactical and logistic reasons, the parliamentary elections were finally held on 3 July 1994. The presidential elections required two rounds, one simultaneous with the parliamentary election, and the final one held on 7 August. International observers (present only on the first occasion) and local public opinion agreed that, on the whole, the elections had been fair and regular (Endnote 2).

At the national level, the old ruling party, PAIGC (Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde) scored 38 per cent of the votes in the parliamentary election. Thanks to the workings of the proportional system of representation, favouring the largest party in each constituency (Endnote 3), this gave the PAIGC 62 of the 100 seats at stake, while the various opposition parties together only got 38 seats, although their combined share of the votes was about equal to that of the PAIGC. The outcome is a situation with six parties represented in parliament and four remaining outside.

The presidential election, in the final round, turned out to be dramatic. The former president João Bernardo ‘Nino’ Vieira was challenged by seven other candidates in
The first round. With 39.9 per cent he came out first, but as he got less than half of the total vote, a second round was required by the constitution, where ‘Nino’ was to face the opponent who had come second in the first round. This was Koumba Yalá, former PAIGC activist, but now the young leader of the opposition party PRS (Partido da Renovação Social), of a socially radical and somewhat populist bent. In the parliamentary election, the PRS only got 12 seats. Still, in the second round of the presidential election, Koumba Yalá was very close to defeating the president of the old system. In the final count he got 48 per cent of the approved votes versus 52 per cent for ‘Nino’.

‘Only You and God Know How You Vote’

The 1994 elections had taken place in regular fashion in Kandjadja, as well as in most places all over Guinea-Bissau. In April 1996 a poster stating in Creole that ‘only you and God know how you vote’ was still left on the wall of the local shop in the village of Kandjadja. It seems that this rule had been well respected in the village.

The number of potential voters, citizens having reached the age of eighteen at least thirty days before voting day, had been counted at 394 in Kandjadja. Of these, 371 had registered as voters. The actual turnout on 3 July was 81.9 per cent (304) of registered voters, and on 7 August it was as high as 97.8 per cent (363).

As seen from the table below, the position of the PAIGC among the voters was stronger in the village than in the country as a whole. But the ruling party was not unchallenged. The opposition was far from negligible. If the distribution of seats had been decided only on the basis of Kandjadja’s votes, the third mandate would have gone to the PCD, a party that did not even manage to get any representation at all at national level. This shows among other things that the democratic system functioned, in the sense that a specific opinion was able to manifest itself at the local level. The final result of the presidential election in Kandjadja differed even more strikingly from the national result. President ‘Nino’ scored as high as 328 votes, which is 88.4 per cent of the total number of registered voters. Koumba Yalá got 35 votes (9.4 per cent), while the rate of abstention as already mentioned was very low (2.2 per cent or 8 individuals). ‘Nino’s’ position is thus seen to be very strong in Kandjadja, in fact much stronger than that of the party PAIGC.

To sum up, it seems clear that the local voters felt fairly free to express their opinions as voters and that many of them took the chance to manifest their criticism of ‘the party’, while not being prepared to see anybody else than ‘Nino’, the former hero of the national liberation struggle, as their president. Thus, free elections had been held. What would come next?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 1: Result of Parliamentary Elections in Kandjadja, 3 July 1994</th>
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<td><strong>No. of Votes</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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Source: notes taken on election day by the controller named by the PAIGC and approved by the National Electoral Commission for the electoral district of Kandjadja.
Post-Electoral Development and Democratisation

National Level

Until now, democratisation at the national level in Guinea-Bissau has meant the institutionalisation of a new political system, where the government is forced to accept scrutiny by the opposition and where civil and associational rights, without being perfectly guaranteed, are considerably better ensured than before.

The majority of the population, however, live their lives basically outside the constitutional political system. Here, there are few indications of increasing popular sovereignty. It is true that within the deregulated economy more space than before is provided for private initiatives, which naturally favours some individuals and well organised groups. But generally, the great majority of the population within the agricultural sector of the economy have not seen their relations with the state decisively altered through democratisation. Continued structural adjustment of the economy in combination with inflation keeps harshens economic and social conditions, mainly in the urban areas, where ever more people migrate from the countryside. During the spring of 1996, the minimum wage was not even enough to cover the price of a fifty-kilogram bag of the daily rice. In the countryside, developments are uneven. Increasing differentiation favours some farmers within the framework of the deregulated economy, but the new opportunities do not suffice for all, while old ones dry up and stagnate. Deterioration of educational and health facilities causes young people to move to the towns.

In the long run it is difficult to reconcile such contradictions in society with the democratic form of rule, although it is impossible to say in advance where the breaking-point will manifest itself. From a general point of view, we may assume that democracy, in the short and middle term, makes people more prepared to accept harsh conditions than do other forms of rule – but only as long as they, as citizens, perceive themselves to share responsibility for a better future. If this assumption holds, then the consolidation of democracy in Guinea-Bissau will hardly be possible without greater popular sovereignty in society as a whole.

The overriding threat to democratisation is poverty and the difficult conditions of life, which do not seem to improve for the majority of the population. Discontent was manifested for instance in a series of demonstrations and strikes by opposition parties and the national trade union organisation during the last quarter of 1995, under slogans such as ‘against hunger, corruption, and a government moving backwards’ (No Pintcha, 1995; Voz de Bissau; Bonbero, 1995). In a well documented report from the Swedish Embassy in Bissau, on the causes of poverty in a society such as that of Guinea-Bissau, attention is drawn to the growing social differentiation and the intertwining of politics and economics under continued structural adjustment – factors which ‘will make it more and more difficult for the majority of Guineans to resolve their problems of poverty and vulnerability’ (Rupp, 1966:11).

Village Level

The meeting held in Kandjadja on 19 March 1996, mentioned in the beginning of this article, was about the meaning of democratisation in the area. The majority of the about one hundred participants from the section were men, but several women also took part. All ages were represented, from youths to elders. One speaker began by stating that the outcome of the election should be interpreted as an indication of confidence in ‘the party’ and the President of the Republic. This received general
support from those present. But what had happened since then, the speaker went on to say, was nothing but a great ‘shame’ (vergonha): so many broken promises, so little that had actually been fulfilled. A speakers’ list was rapidly set up. What follows is a selection of what was said:

Middle-aged to Elderly Men:

• Democracy has its sides, both good and bad. In our society it may cause the young people to speak freely in the presence of old people, which is good. But it may also cause the young people to leave the old people in the village and take off to the city. Another negative side of democracy is that it may cause the young people to cease listening to the old and experienced people.

Here in our country democracy does not signify that the people hold the power, for the government does not respect the people. The voters voted for the PAIGC, because they sympathise with the values of the struggle for liberation from colonialism. But what is happening?

The government ought to support the production of local rice and raise the prices of imported goods.

• We must have patience to endure a lot of things. Development requires time. But it would be good, if the government could take measures to deal with the problem of freely roaming cattle, destroying our cashew fields.

• In the name of Mohammed – it must be said that this matter of democracy has old roots. All began with our struggle against forced labour under colonialism. Cabral helped us organise the struggle. We managed to get rid of forced labour. After three thousand and sixty-two days of struggle in the forest, we managed to get rid of forced labour. But still the abuses of power continue. Leaders make promises which they do not honour.

• Having candidates who come to the village before election-day to fish for votes but who return to the capital once they have been elected, this makes as little sense as keeping a spare wheel for a car at 110 kilometres distance away from the car.

• To me democracy and PAIGC mean the same. The first time our guest came here (in 1976), we only had two houses, as we had just returned from the war. Thanks to God and the Party things are different today.

• The war of liberation lasted for eighteen rainy seasons. Democracy has both positive and negative sides. Thanks to democracy, the war veterans now receive their pensions. But the deputies ought to listen to those who have elected them. They should do something about the problem of access to water. The elected representatives ought to function as links between the people and the state. If we were able to invest the taxes we pay in our own road, that would be good.

• Democracy in Mandinga is ‘to seek happiness’. This means building schools and health centres. But it also signifies that we are able now to remind the government of what Cabral used to say: that the forest has to be well taken care of, because it is a great richness. All of Guinea-Bissau ought to be like a beautiful forest. This we may now state quite openly, thanks to democracy.

• Democracy is positive, because it is open. Today we are able to know many things we could not know before.
• I want to speak on how democracy has been after the election. We have great problems with access to water. The promises that were given during the election campaign have not been kept. We have a Mandinga proverb which the parliamentary deputies should be aware of: 'Only if you sleep in a bed, can you know if there are fleas in it.' It is necessary that there exist contacts between the people and their representatives. The deputies have to give answers to the questions posed by the people, yes or no, like a family must answer if somebody asks for a daughter. Dissatisfaction arises, if no answer is given.

Younger Men

• All parties extended promises in all directions. But so far we have not seen much of what was promised. The lack of water is the greatest problem of all. We must get a decent road leading up to the village. We should select old men to bring our points of view to the president.

• Democracy has both positive and negative sides. Let us speak concretely. Thanks to democracy, an end has been put to some abuses in the prisons. Nor do we any longer have armed thieves in the forest stealing our timber. This is good. But where, in our part of the country, has the government helped us drill a well? Nowhere. If the PAIGC does not do anything concrete for us, we will not vote for them. If no concrete improvements take place, we shall withdraw.

• The positive effects of democracy are enormous. Thanks to God and democracy I have learnt about all these parties. Earlier I only knew of FLING and PAIGC. Nowadays we hear a lot of interesting things in the radio. Earlier we did not.

Elderly Woman

• Today I do not vote for the PAIGC. Each time I hear the name PAIGC, I weep, for I lost both my father and my mother in the war. After the armed struggle, our misery increased. Taxes are much too high. The women are the ones who have to find the money to pay the taxes.

Younger Woman

• I would like to speak about democracy. We ought to have elections every other year, as democracy contributes to understanding between people, it causes us to talk to each other about problems we have in common. As far as I myself am concerned, I belong to the opposition, but PAIGC also does good things. Through democracy we compete with each other in a positive way and encourage each other to do good things.

A person who did not take part in the meeting told me later that democracy in his view signifies confusion. By this he meant that even if a person longs for freedom from oppression, it feels strange to be faced with a choice between the only state power you know and a number of untried and unknown parties and leaders whom you do not trust and some of whom are known to be at least as cruel and dishonest as the ones in power until now. Most who spoke in the meeting were elderly men. In Mandinga society they are more accustomed than young people to speak in public, just as men in general, independently of age, are more accustomed than women to do so. Precisely for those reasons, it was significant that several younger men and a few women did take part in our meeting quite freely.

In effect, the state does very little in concrete terms for the village and the area. When I first visited Kandjadjia in 1976, two years after independence, there was a well
functioning school in the village, with three state-employed teachers and around two hundred pupils. In the following years, the number of students and teachers dwindled, until in 1988 there were only sixteen students and one teacher. In 1989, the school was closed down. Since then, a flourishing Koranic school is the only place where the children of Kandjadja receive basic instruction. Other manifestations of the modern developmental state – such as the state employed nurse and the ‘people’s store’ for the sale of basic goods – all disappeared even before 1988. Of all aid extended to Guinea-Bissau over the years, only two activities have ever reached Kandjadja in any visible manner: these are a basic health project supported by UNICEF offering some health care and medicaments at subsidised prices since 1988, and the African non-governmental organisation RADI, trying since 1990 to encourage the villagers to develop their agriculture on the basis of their own resources and experiences.

The same basic contradiction with regard to development and democracy is found in Kandjadja as at the national level. The people see the new political system as contributing to personal freedom and the rule of law. This is welcomed and positively viewed. But the citizens feel betrayed, at the same time, as so many promises have been given without being kept. Life is as harsh as ever. The people’s patience is great, but it is hardly unlimited. ‘If no concrete improvements take place, we shall withdraw.’

Civil Society and Development

The official development ideology in Guinea-Bissau today, as in many countries, is to leave a lot of space to the autonomous efforts of citizens within ‘civil society’ (Proenca, 1996). But this does not answer the question of how far the state can withdraw without leaving large groups of the population without access to common resources. In order to avoid that, the state may also choose to increase the space for citizen responsibility within state institutions, usually through democratisation by decentralisation. This, in fact, is also on the agenda of the government of Guinea-Bissau, where elections for regional and local assemblies to complement the 1994 parliamentary and presidential elections are under preparation, although it is not clear yet when they will take place (Voz de Bissau, 14 and 30 May 1996).

The strategic question, obviously, is how these two approaches, for instance, state withdrawal versus the democratisation of the state – can be made to supplement and support each other. In order for the decentralised state organs to be credible in the eyes of the people, they must for instance also control some financial resources.

In Kandjadja

In Kandjadja, as in other parts of Guinea-Bissau, local government so far has not controlled any developmentally significant financial resources. Even if a local assembly were to be installed there within the coming years, it is uncertain whether it would carry enough weight to achieve credibility. In civil society, on the other hand, something quite new actually did happen in the early nineteen-nineties. One-party rule had made it impossible in practice for non-governmental organisations to function in developmental work without being closely linked to state and party. Autonomous initiatives of more than local significance were almost unthinkable.

Kandjadja was only one of many villages where the economy stagnated and cultural and political life was turned inwards, often in ethnic directions.
But in 1990, political liberalisation and democratisation brought new opportunities. RADI began to visit Kandjadja, encouraging the people to develop local agriculture on the basis of their own organisational traditions. This is how RADI (n.d.) characterises itself in a recent brochure:

To RADI, development is a comprehensive process through which a population recovers its own resources and puts them to work according to its own cultural values in order to resolve its individual and collective problems by creating over a very long period of time a frame of life where each stage is better than the preceding one. Development should result from the dynamic and durable linking together of the natural environment and the socio-cultural setting of the population.

Popular response was strong. The innovative work is carried on completely independently of local state and party structures. RADI provides seeds on credit as well as technical instruction. The participants divide work between themselves, in age groups: youths, married people, old people. Within each group, women take active part. A large meeting hall and youth club has been built with local means, as well as storage houses for seeds, tools and products. This is the first time, since the early years of independence, that something introduced from outside has evoked such broad trust in Kandjadja (see Endnote 1).

Supposing that a directly elected local assembly is established in Kandjadja within a few years, how it relates to RADI will then be crucial to its chances of functioning in the area. If, for instance, the state school could be re-opened thanks to state decentralisation, such an achievement would probably contribute greatly to increasing the local legitimacy of the state.

The example of Kandjadja demonstrates how the absence of the state in developmental work has created a vacuum, as well as deep popular disenchantment. This in turn has opened up chances for an organisation such as RADI to strike a chord of strong response within civil society. Thanks to democratisation this became legal. Still, it is difficult to see how continued development could take place without the presence of more dynamic state power than up to now. In spite of democratisation, the gap between society and state is as deep as ever. In a way it is even deeper, as new hopes and expectations have been called forth and quickly betrayed. The democratic decentralisation of the state under preparation is thus logical, although weakly rooted so far in local society.

‘If No Concrete Improvements Take Place, We Shall Withdraw’

In early 1996, the Guinea-Bissau social science research institute INEP published a book outlining four future scenarios for the country, two on the positive and two on the negative side (Imbali et al., 1996). The four scenarios are constructed around three ‘key uncertainties’: political stability and ‘governance’, international aid, the market for agricultural products. All three are highly interdependent variables which are very difficult to control for a country such as Guinea-Bissau. According to the argument of the authors, political stability and ‘good governance’ combined is a necessary condition for the two positive scenarios to materialise. ‘Good governance’ means functioning democratic constitutionalism. In the two positive scenarios this is supported through measures improving the living conditions of the people and opening up opportunities for them to assume responsibility for the development of the country.
But how is this to become possible? The author sees no simple prescription. They seem to think in terms of combinations of good will with regard to such political and institutional factors as can be controlled from within the country and possible good luck with regard to variables that cannot be controlled, such as aid and international agricultural markets.

It is interesting to compare this analysis with a broad study of recent processes of democratisation in Africa, where two US political scientists try to distinguish factors explaining transition to democracy (Bratton & van de Walle, 1997). In this context, 'explain' is synonymous with having a significant statistical correlation with transition to democracy. Guinea-Bissau is one of twenty-nine countries included in the investigation. One important result is that 'level of democracy' in 1994 (in terms of political rights) is significantly related to the following variables as measured during the period preceding transition: 1) military intervention, 2) number of elections held, 3) frequency of political protest, and 4) the share of legislative seats held by the opposition in 1989 (Ibid.). These correlations, as such, are neither implausible nor difficult to understand. But, as the authors themselves indicate, they tell us very little about the chances that the newly established democracies will survive into sustainability, that is, to become 'consolidated'. In order to be able to reflect with insight on that question, which is the one raised by the Kandjadja example, we need other kinds of analyses and investigations – asking why and under what conditions people actually prefer democratic forms of rule to other conceivable forms of rule.

In a general way, we may state that democratic legitimacy has two types of foundations. One concerns what is deemed by people to be just and right, and the other what they find useful and possible in their lives. This is the double foundation of democracy struggles across the world, both historically and in our own time (Rudebeck, 1989).

The insight is the same as expressed by the local people at the meeting in Kandjadja. Lofty ideals and control over material conditions of life are simultaneously at stake. Democratic take-off requires a measure of convergence between proclaimed ideals and actual relations of power in society.

Lars Rudebeck, University of Uppsala, Sweden. The present article draws on a recent report on the process of democratisation in the country as a whole, published in Swedish and Portuguese by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) under the title 'Buscar a felicidade'. Democratização na Guiné-Bissau, Sida, Stockholm/Bissau, 1996. There, extensive information is provided on literature, documents, and interviews. My latest visits to Guinea-Bissau were in November-January 1988-89, November-December 1991, November-December 1993, and March-April 1996.

Endnotes

1. RADI is an African NGO with national organisations in Burkina Faso, The Central African Republic, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea-Conakry, Mali, Mauretania, Senegal and Zaïre. See the brochure quoted in note 19. The Guinea-Bissau branch of RADI has its national headquarters in Farim, sleepy capital of the region of Oio. Its collaboration with Guinean authorities, West-African sister organisations, and various international authorities is handled from the Bissau office of the Swiss aid organisation Swissaid. This office is headed by a Guinean who is at the same time the RADI coordinator in Guinea-Bissau and the local representative of Swissaid. The Guinean branch of RADI is able to function thanks partly to the material support offered by Swissaid. Thus, even
RADI depends on foreign aid, in spite of all its work being carried out by Guineans, the administration being small-scale, and local support strong.

2. Information given here on the outcome of the 1994 elections is based both on the published and on the internal materials of the National Electoral Commission, verified by the UNDP observer and supported i.a. by the team of Swedish observers, as well as on the full reports published in 1994 by the independent Guinean journal Correio Guiné-Bissau.

3. The specific method used in this case was the so-called 'd'Hondt method', named after a Belgian jurist who devised it in the late 19th century. By this, each time a party has been allotted a seat, the number of votes received by that party is divided by the number of seats received + 1, before comparing again with the numbers received by the remaining parties. If there are many parties in the run, of which one is clearly larger than the others, this means that the largest party often gets both the first and either the second or the third seat (sometimes both) in any given constituency.

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The Mercenary Business: ‘Executive Outcomes’

Jeremy Harding

Executive Outcomes is an army for hire. A sophisticated force, the ‘company’ will not work for rebel movements but contracts with ‘democratic’ governments. ‘Executive Outcomes is the small wave of the future in terms of defence and security, because the international community has abdicated that role’ (Barlow, 1997). Rather than being seen as mercenaries, they prefer the label of ‘corporate troubleshooters’, a niche which incorporates a huge unmet demand for security in Africa.

The soldiers of fortune who followed the wake of crisis in Africa during the sixties and seventies were bound to clandestinity; the public bragging came later. In most cases they were sourly and implacably opposed to national liberation which they saw as a communist conspiracy on behalf of an inferior race that had failed to identify its interests with those or its betters. For the mercenaries who fought in Katanga at the time of the Congo disaster, in Angola before independence, anti-communist ideology had a useful subsuming role: greed, adventurism and some brusque racial views comfortably rolled up into a defence of the free world.

Executive Outcomes (EO) is a mercenary organisation which represents a new incarnation of the army for hire. The cant and truculence of its predecessors are much harder to detect, even though it was put together in the closing stages of apartheid, which most of its personnel served with dedication. Since it was founded in 1989, it has fielded a force of at least five hundred men, under a core of mostly South African white officers, against rebel groups in west and southern Africa, using light armoured vehicles, helicopters and fixed wing aircraft. Despite higher casualties than it had hoped, it has made a good showing. Above all, it has taken political and military instability in Africa to be a market issue – that of massive unmet demand for security – and positioned itself perfectly in that market. Executive Outcomes thrives on the absence of civility, consensus, law and order; its biggest operations so far have been in countries with valuable mineral resources. Its position in a complicated network of companies, registered anywhere between the Cape and the Isle of Man, makes it more than a military force, and its corporate links give it cozenage with some well-respected figures in Britain. Its greatest friends are probably vulnerable civilians whose environment it has secured against armed conflict – displaced peasant farmers, piece-workers, impoverished miners, people who are less concerned with the idea that their nation-state may have become a job-lot than they are with physical safety, food and livelihood, all of which Executive Outcomes has reinstated for tens of thousands of non-combatants in Africa. Yet no one would disagree that it is first and last a mercenary force, however carefully repackaged.

Much of the packaging work is carried out by the company’s general manager, Eeben Barlow, who has overseen Executive Outcomes biggest contracts and helped it onto a
sound financial footing in the nineties. Barlow is able, a good talker, thoughtful and prepossessing in a bleak sort of way; gaunt face and eyes that droop at their outer edges, a lived-in look and an easy manner. He is a vigilant PR man with the right background for the job. While he was a boy, his family moved from Northern Rhodesia to South Africa, where he finished his education in 1972; two years later, as apartheid's border wars were about to begin in earnest, he joined South Africa's more notorious military outfits, put together by Jan Breytenback — the writer's brother — from an assortment of homeboys, Rhodesians and Angolans. ‘Buffalo Battalion’ was essential to South Africa's strategy of regional destabilisation north and west of its legitimate borders. Most if its duties were in support and on behalf of Unita, Jonas Savimbi's Angolan rebel movement (Executive Outcomes now has Angolan soldiers on its payroll).

Barlow must have done well. After a stint in the 32nd Battalion, he moved to Military Intelligence, which handled dirty tricks, including the Renamo insurgency in Mozambique. He worked for the Civil Co-Operation Bureau (CCB), a wholly non-accountable echelon of the South African Defence Force (SADF) that had its own approach to national security at home and abroad until it was disbanded by de Klerk in a blaze of hostile publicity in 1990. By then, EO was a registered company and many of the people who might have worried about their career prospects in the new South Africa had somewhere to turn. Barlow's duties had been overseas, as part of the CCBs Western European operation. Much of the Bureau's energy abroad was spent setting up front-companies to circumvent sanctions – an expertise which is clearly paying off today for a lot of ex-security officers.

EO is primarily a boardroom operation, less a model of military than corporate aggression. While Barlow has a way of speaking about the company's benefits to civilians as though he were running a Christian outreach project, the real objective is profit and the strategy is diversification. EO is part of a complicated corporate family in which the nearest thing to a parent company is probably Strategic Resource Corporation (SRC). SRC is based in South Africa and EO exists alongside or within it as one of at least a dozen companies – 32 according to one estimate – involved in a range of lesser security services for private and corporate clients, in air charter and, directly or indirectly, in mining. The SRC family gives EO a wide margin of manoeuvre, both in terms of capital movement and assignation of personnel. SRC may even exist primarily to offer this flexibility which is particularly important for a mercenary force looking for respectable ways to sidestep political pressure and stay in business.

Since 1993, Companies House in London has carried records of an Executive Outcomes Ltd. with offices in Hampshire. Barlow and a British subject, who became his wife after the company filed, are named as the holders of 70 per cent of its capital. The good sense of putting EO on paper in Britain has much to do with the fact that London is an international centre of informal defence and security activity, arms dealing and war-profiteering. At the same time, EO has had poor press in South Africa and there are people outside the country arguing that an organisation of its kind will do nothing to advance the demilitarisation of Africa. The pressure on the South African government to restrict its movements or close it down has been growing, but Executive Outcomes (Pty), with offices in Pretoria, is flourishing.

There is not much that the South African Government could do, even if it wanted to curtail EOs activities — a point on which there is probably disagreement. Aziz Pahad,
the Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister, who regards EO as a poor ambassador for the new South Africa, has said that he would like to see an end to it. Barlow, however, likes to argue that relations with the Government are not so bad and that the bulk of South African opposition to EO comes from members of the old guard – military intelligence and other elements of the cumbersome security apparatus that flourished in the eighties; he is not specific about the reasons for this. But EO may well be a cause of envy and resentment in South Africa’s old security culture. It could, in theory, constitute a safety cushion for anyone whose name was liable to crop up in connection with apartheid crimes – a situation which can cut off earnings, lead to jail sentences or raise the possibility of private retribution. At monthly rates of anywhere between $2000 and $12,000 a month, the pay of an EO officer is much more that he could expect to earn in the SADF or by setting up in the security sector, already highly competitive in South Africa, and is well placed for an new start if necessary. His equivalent, soldiering on inside the country, has no such reassurances.

At the same time, EO is a highly selective club for the late 20th century voortrekker. Its members push up into Africa, away from the constraints of a meddlesome administration, and continue the Afrikaner quest for solitude, lebensraum, exemption. They rely on skills which are no longer openly desirable at home – rugged self-reliance and bush welfare – and live in accordance with a tribal mythology that other Afrikaners, the real volk who cannot accompany them, are obliged to set aside. Unlike their forbears, the EO trekkers can return every few weeks to the spouse and children they did not take along, regale their friends with tales of adventure and file away their foreign bank statements. Meanwhile, EO is using the SADF – along with the police, and the remains of Koevoet (or crowbar), a former counter-insurgency force in Namibia – as a skilled labour pool. The SADF regards the loss of trained personnel, pilots especially, as crude poaching.

Finally, there is the problem of EO’s first substantial fighting contract, which it won in 1993, working on behalf of the Angolan Government, its former enemies, against Unita, its erstwhile friends. Nothing could have signalled more clearly that old alliances had been abandoned. EO’s work began in the north, where, on unreliable information, they put down by helicopter in the middle of a Unita exercise and fought under extreme pressure for a week or more until the rebels withdrew. By the end of last year, when their contract ended, they had trained an Angolan special battalion, flown MiGs and modified training aircraft in combat over Unita’s bases – Savimbi was said to have been wounded in one of these raids – and nudged the rebels back to the negotiating table. For this, EO is believed to have been paid in the region of $40 million a year for two years by the Angolan Government. Once again, the company took to the drubbing of Unita less like a treacherous comrade-in-arms than a corporate raider. Angola was strictly business.

Not everybody would have seen it that way. Colonel Jan Breytenbach, for instance, who had built the 32nd Battalion into a versatile force behind Savimbi, must have felt the sting of betrayal on the rebels’ behalf. During the cold war, there were any number of complaints by white officers in Angola about the incompetence of their Unita friends and there was the statutory racism, but in reality allegiances were fierce. For much of his career Breytenbach was a straight-forward soldier, whose involvement in dirty tricks – including the alleged training of Inkatha contingents up in northern Namibia for the butcher’s war with the ANC – was less than it might have been. When he went public at the end of South Africa’s 13-year excursion in Angola, it was to lambaste the running of ivory and hardwoods out of the combat zone by South
Africans whom he regarded not as proper soldiers like himself but as civilians in uniform: securocrats subsidising the war improperly and racketeers lining their own pockets. The two were hard to tell apart as the old order crumbled.

In Colonel Breytenbach's view, there are three or four things you cannot do: you cannot despoil the natural beauty of Africa (elephants and rain forest), you cannot serve in an army and be more or less than a soldier, you cannot easily forget old friends and you cannot make war a means of self-enrichment. He is also critical of EO's treatment of its personnel. He has argued that they were not always looked after in Angola and that the company might have offered better terms of employment, considering the dangers of the work. EO is thought to have lost as many as 14 men in its first year in Angola. Breytenbach was approached by several next-of-kin in South Africa asking him to press their case with the company: they had received no word of compensation and sketchy information about the circumstances of death or capture. He was not surprised. EO's managers were precisely that - a bunch of managers on the make.

This is scarcely going to throw EO off course. Nor, perhaps, are protestations by the ANC, whose inclination to act against the company at the time of its contract in Angola, when it first came under international scrutiny, was clearly moderated by residual loyalties to the Angolan Government: the ANC were given bases in Angola for more than a decade, and some of its units saw action on behalf of the Government against UNITA. The economic prospects for the new South Africa in a post-war Angola have helped to keep these loyalties alive. There may even be senior members of the ANC whose links with Angola, and with SRC, offer tangible rewards.

There are implicit indemnities in all of this for the company, however loudly the ANC protests, and these must be weighed against EO's past and its controversial present. Two years ago, the South African Police undertook an inquiry into the company but there was insufficient evidence, in the view of the Attorney General's office in Gauteng, to bring a case against it. On the face of it, EO has little to fear from the clauses in the recent Constitution that could be invoked against it for its activities abroad. It may also be that the company has something to offer the government by way of intelligence and military assistance. If it can move so swiftly against its old acquaintances in Angola, it is impossible to rule out action on behalf of the South African government against the lingering political and quasi-political violence that plagues the country: Buthelezi's violence, for example, or the violence of a recognised extremist 'right', or the violence of dissatisfied supporters of the ANC itself. What matters is that the quality of service should be unobtainable elsewhere and that the price should be right. Whatever transactions occur between the government and the company, they will be underpinned by a familiar market model: public sector deregulation, in which expertise is shed and purchased back on a piecemeal basis - in this case at the instigation of the seller.

Barlow likes to stress that his company undertakes no work for rebel movements: EO's services are available only to legitimate governments; he also says that he will seek to encourage the growth of democracy wherever EO works - a slightly chilling remark from a former CCB operative, but times change and markets with them. By legitimate, Barlow simply means sovereign and internationally recognised, but legitimacy is not so straightforward in Africa. Would EO have worked in Algeria, for example, against the various components of the Islamic Salvation Front, kept from democratic victory at the polls in 1992? Would it work in Sudan, where an Islamic government is persecuting non-Islamic groups in the south? What of a strong leadership in Rwanda,
orchestrating a genocide? In these countries, millions of citizens regarded, or still regard, their rulers as worse than illegitimate, yet Barlow would be playing by his own rules by taking the government shilling in any of them, just as he has stuck to the book by working for the MPLA in Angola and the military rulers of Sierra Leone, which is currently the company’s biggest area of operations.

Last February Sierra Leone held its first multi-party elections since 1977. The transition to democracy was negotiated under the aegis of an unstable military leadership; the election was taking place six weeks after an officers coup had replaced the president; parts of the country were snapped in civil war. The bloodshed and disarray in Liberia, the country’s southeastern neighbour, had spilled over into parts of Sierra Leone for several years, while its own internal conflict, involving Liberian contingents on loan to the Government, had prompted the departure of roughly a quarter of a million refugees, mostly northeast to Guinea. Like a camel sizing up the needles eye, this extremely fertile country, with enough mineral wealth to develop and enrich it, had been steadily scaling the table of Africa’s, then the world’s, poorest nations: two-thirds of the population are now estimated to live in absolute poverty. Two years ago, the UN Development Programme put the country among the lowest five in a survey of living and development standards conducted in more than 170 member states.

Underlying the contest of 13 parties and their presidential candidates was a three-cornered standoff: the mass of voters favoured the election despite fears that it would amount to nothing, the Army was in more minds than one and the rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) threatened to disrupt it. In many ways, the rebels and the rebel war – which had drawn in Executive Outcomes – were the key. There was little to suggest that a national election called in the course of hostilities between the government and the RUF was a sound idea, although its advocates argued that the existing regime was in such disrepute that only a transfer of power would convince the rebels to settle. But the conflict was also a pretext for the army to annul the vote if it chose.

The RUF was operating mostly in the eastern parts of Sierra Leone, with sporadic activities in the centre. In Bo, inland to the southeast, there were reports of rebel intimidation on the day before the vote, which escalated in the course of the election and its aftermath; by the time it was over, the main hospital contained twenty or thirty victims of gunshot wounds and atrocities. In Freetown, however, there was no threat from the RUF, which was held by its inhabitants in the same contempt as the Army. That disdain was a luxury bestowed by EO who had been deployed in 1995 to stop a rebel push before it reached the city. They had also driven the rebels from the diamond mining district of Kono, in the Eastern Province, and were in the process of securing another key mining area south of the capital, overrun early in the same year. They had managed all this without much difficulty. The notion that a successful election might end the war was not, therefore, the fond illusion one might have imagined so much as a useful misconstruction – for the rebels had already been confined, they were in negotiations with the government, and an end to the war, or a prolonged pause, appeared to be in sight. The people of Sierra Leone had EO to thank for that, and many of them did.

The road out east to Wellington, a few miles from the centre of Freetown, was good. I took it with Dr Edward Nahim, a consultant psychologist and lecturer supervising a rehabilitation project for former underage combatants in rebel militias, government forces and semi-autonomous units. There was room for roughly a hundred young
people on the property taken over from the government by Children Associated with
War – part of a sprawling, ill-appointed juvenile reform centre at the end of a dirt
track some distance from the main road. Nahim and his colleagues were stretched at
the time, because Eeben Barlow’s men were referring youngsters from the areas they’d
secured up-country. It was the first tangible evidence of EO activity a visitor to Sierra
Leone was likely to encounter and it did the company credit.

The Sierra Leone Army had been drafting in minors for several years, often through a
system of patronage in which an offer in a remote posting would take on young, able
members of families that could no longer sustain themselves. RUF ranks, too, had
their share of minors. In Ivory Coast, I was shown a video-tape of a forest full of them.
It was the occasion of a visit by the rebel leader, Foday Sankoh, a quixotic patriarch in
typical dress who had taken his objections to military rule a step further than most
of his compatriots. His review of the base revealed that the youngsters in his rank and
file had all adopted complicated haircuts with inscriptions, legends and motifs of the
kind found in Freetown, Los Angeles and London, and a good hour of his tour was
taken up superintending a mass shearing. Young combatants were also operating in
the plentiful grey areas of the conflict. They might be in the charge of a government
officer whose units were actively looting, or masquerading as rebels, or conniving
with rebels – sobels (soldier-rebels) was a common term for these impartial predators
– in a resource-sharing venture that would leave their target areas almost
uninhabitable for civilians. Others would have a semi-detached relationship with
their Army of RUF superior, or with youthful commanders in the tattered, dissolute
Liberian contingents stranded in the country.

Because EO had contact with the Sierra Leone Army, they took most juvenile
combatants from government ranks and flew them by helicopter to Freetown. There
were fifty or so on Nahim’s project. Most of them looked as though they had been
rescued from the edge of an abyss. Safea Komba, an 11-year-old from the diamond
area in Eastern Province, had been running ammunition for the government through
RUF positions in some local impasse outside the main town in the area. His father
belonged to a civilian militia drawn form a traditional guild of hunters: men with old
or homemade firearms, a good knowledge of the forest, good intelligence and little
time for the RUF. Komba had been caught in the bush by the rebels; he said he was
carrying food to his relatives, but live rounds were discovered in his bags. He was
assaulted and cut at the shoulder and head with a machete and left to die. EO picked
him up a few months after his recovery. There were many others: a 16-year-old girl
called Florence who had gone crazy after seeing a rebel mutilated by her commander;
a 15-year-old boy convalescing from a bullet wound in the arm; a private of the same
age who went about the centre with a toy revolver tucked into the top of his shorts.

Nahim started incomers to the centre on a detox programme. Marijuana and alcohol-
dependency were common; there was some evidence of heroin use and of a stimulant
administered in food: Nahim said it was gunpowder. Literacy classes, practical
workshops and group therapies of various kinds re-equipped the children for civilian
life. Those who had come in with EO were very much better off for its child-soldier
shuttle and, as I found out later, it was something Barlow’s men liked to crow about. It
also enhanced the company’s chivalrous image – difficult to begrudge it that. The
seductive parallel with the sentimental grunt troubled by the pathos of children in a
Vietnamese village range false in the end: EO, after all, was not involved in operations
of massive destruction for geo-strategic objective. They were in Sierra Leone for the
money. Their action was extremely specific. And wherever they went, civilians
stopped dying. The trouble was that they only went where the pay-off was high. The children they had brought to Nahims centre came from Kono. If you did not live in one of Sierra Leone’s mineral-rich enclaves, and yet you were beset by rebels and soldiers, EO was not disposed to help you: that was the case in Bo, where the Army, or the rebels, or both, had made their point at election time.

There were people in Sierra Leone who felt strongly about EO’s nose for money. They wanted to know what the company was receiving for its work, how the payments were made and how long they were likely to continue. The Sierra Leone exchequer is scarcely overflowing and one report in the international press claimed that when it was stretched to the limit the possibility of transferring scheduled IMF payments to the company was raised. Journalists at the Standard Times, and independent paper based in Freetown, are convinced that EO also enjoys a good share of the profits from Branch Energy, a mining company which is thought to have one gold concession, at least two concessions on alluvial diamonds and another for a valuable Kimberlite formation in Kono. But under military rule, this was a story they were unable to research beyond hearsay and one they would have published at their peril. The arrangements between EO, Branch Energy and the government have been the subject of intense speculation and maximum discretion. Last year, the Standard Times reported a conference in Freetown at which the head of the teachers union called for the withdrawal of EO’s men from Sierra Leone. He described them as hard-core apartheid attack dogs, a remark which, when quoted in the paper, led to the arrest of the speaker and the editor. At the end of a morning in the office of the Times—a shop front not much bigger than a bus shelter—one of the journalists told me that Freetonians would have no difficulty with EO and Branch Energy, provided there was transparency about the terms on which they were operating.

Outside Sierra Leone these terms are no easier to ascertain. EO must surely receive some money from the Sierra Leone Government—Barlow thinks cash payments are a good idea—but there are reasons for thinking that EO is also subsidised by Branch Energy. The connections between the two are very close and they predate the operation in Sierra Leone, where EO is as closely involved as it has been in Angola in protecting Branch Energy’s areas of operation. The linking figure is Tony Buckingham, a British entrepreneur, former military man with business interests in Africa and the Middle East. Wherever EO goes, Buckingham’s name goes with it, whether whispered, acclaimed or stridently withheld. He is widely perceived as the eminence grise of the company. A high-ranking official in Sierra Leone has said that Buckingham was directly involved in the negotiations leading to the contract between EO and the military regime last year, as well as the agreement struck with Branch Energy—which was described four years ago in Lloyds List as his brainchild. Unlike Barlow, Buckingham steers clear of journalists; as a result, the speculative forays of the press—including the suggestion that he contributes to one of the few independent publishing houses in Britain—are as dashing as his own. He is involved in an ambitious offshore development scheme in Namibia and projects in Kenya and Uganda. His experience in the oil industry, most publicly at Sabre, a small company which he left in 1991, almost certainly led to EO’s contract in Angola.

In 1992 Buckingham presided over the creation of Heritage Oil and Gas, an acquisition and development venture in which Branch Energy (now Diamond Works) had a substantial share. Heritage was to take part, under the aegis of its largest stakeholders and in conjunction with Ranger Oil, a Canadian firm with which Buckingham was also involved, in the development of two Angolan offshore oilfields.
Within a year of the Heritage start-up, EO had been dropped into a Unita stronghold that threatened to disrupt the logistics of Angola's offshore oil industry. After the fiercest fighting that some of EO's men had ever encountered, several company casualties and a disastrous effort by the Angolan military to reinforce the South African's by sea, the rebels were driven off. EO was now entrenched in Angola. In July 1994, Unita lost a key diamond trading town in Lunda Norte: the Angolan Army was involved in the recapture and EO advised.

According to several accounts, it was the Angolan Government that recommend EO to the military in Sierra Leone. Others say they rode in on the back of Branch Energy. A third view has it that another company based in London and involved in military supply, in Indonesia among other places, engineered EO's entry. In any case, international pressure was mounting on the Angolan's to end their arrangement with EO. Led by the Clinton Administration by the end of 1995, the year they left Angola, both EO and Branch Energy were working in Sierra Leone. Winding down in Angola was a setback for EO: it meant the loss of potential, privatised peace dividend as a supervisor and trainer of the integrated armed forces – remunerative work which now looks destined for a US paramilitary company. The blow was softened not only by the Sierra Leone contract but by EO's ability to shuffle men and resources around the recondite web of companies associated with Strategic Resource Corporation. If EO was no longer in Angola by the start of 1996, there were scores, perhaps hundreds of its personnel left working in the country: a security firm called Saracen, another called Alpha 5, and an air charter company called Ibis. Branch Energy, too, is still Angola.

Buckingham's men have little resemblance to Cecil Rhodes' corporate army or to the scabrous soldiers of fortune who have wheeled in and out of Africa for the last four decades; EO is a more sophisticated force. It contracts with governments but patrols the operations of an adventurous mining concern in which its own people have interests. If it has a future, it will not depend on the kinds of sporadic upset or seismic shift that occurred in Africa during the superpower era but on the rolling instability that began in the nineties, coinciding with the decline of Africa's strategic importance to the West, the UN's disgraces in Somalia, Rwanda and Western Sahara, and the reluctance of foreign companies to risk investors money in insecure circumstances. The regular work that this implies is likely to bring the kind of discipline, and in turn more contracts, that impromptu, hand-to-mouth mercenary activity in the past did not. And where the situation becomes delicate, as it did in Angola, a proportion of men and resources can remain profitably deployed under other names.

The kind or mobility that EO is beginning to master is a huge advantage, but it is not the road to respectability. In PR terms, the paramount chief in a West African village thanking EO on behalf of his people for returning them to normality counts for very little, but a well-known name to put about can be a proper asset and, in this, Heritage has served a purpose. How Sir David Steel came to sit on the board of directors, alongside Buckingham, is not a matter of public record. It is possible that one of his former research assistants, Andrew Gifford, who is also on the board of Heritage, was the link. Gifford has family and other connections at Fleming Mercantile Investment, which eventually took a stake in Heritage, and he is now at GJW, the government consultancy set up in 1980 in partnership with two other former political researchers – Jenny Jeger for James Callaghan, and Wilf Weeks for Edward Heath. The benefits of Steels familiarity with African affairs were no doubt clear to Buckingham. There was still optimism in the air as Heritage prepared to go into Angola. But on the eve of elections which looked as though they might bring peace to the country, Steel was a
useful backstop in the vent of Savimbi, with whom he had some influence, deciding to
cut up rough and spoil the oil or, indeed, of a Unita victory at the polls which would
have required a fair amount of renegotiation by foreign companies in Angola.

Steel is aware of the link between Heritage and EO – potentially a source of damage to
his reputation – but there is no reason for the subject of EO to be raised at Heritage.
Steel’s distance from the sharp end of Buckingham’s business is probably as soon as he
can contrive and the latest information on the rumour mill, that Branch Energy is to be
acquired by a company in Vancouver, may help to put some clear water, blue or
otherwise, between the former president of the Anti-apartheid Movement and some
of apartheid’s most committed former defenders. But for several years now, Steel’s
name has been on hand for anyone in the SRC/Branch Energy/EO brotherhood who
wants the operation to look like a charitable venture.

A journalist from the Standard Times who wants to establish what EO is doing in his
country is unlikely to accompany them in their work: the company imparts and
allocates information over the heads of people whose lives are intimately affected by
its activities. The foreign press is more fortunate. In Sierra Leone, EO has two Soviet
military helicopters. You must squeeze in with men and equipment to get to their
areas of operation. On the pad at the Sierra Leone Army headquarters in Freetown, I
found myself helping up a large man in his sixties, in civilian dress, carrying a
rectangular black briefcase. He didn’t speak to anyone and seemed to find the journey
frightening. We were wedged together a few feet from a line of soldiers with their feet
dangling out of the doorless back of the aircraft. As the sweat soaked through his
trousers and then through mine, it was hard not to imagine a far happier man – five,
six years back perhaps – in a government building in Pretoria, activating counter-
intelligence cells against the liberation movement. When we put down in a burned-off
clearing forty minutes from Freetown, he disappeared in a Land Rover and I never
saw him again. Some forms of travel make the imagination a little feverish, and this
anxious, unsettling figure could simply have been an engineer or an accountant, but it
is an interesting, and unanswerable, question how many non-combatant securocrats
which a compromised past the company is carrying.

In 1995 the RUF had occupied the area we were now in. They had overrun the
property of a large mining company digging for rutile, and another a few miles away
which mined bauxite. They had taken hostages, mostly expatriates, and gutted what
they could. The government, with help from Nigerian pilots, who bombed the
occupied rutile complex, had failed to dislodge them. Some government units and
auxiliaries kept a presence of sorts in the area. Over the next few months, several
thousand civilians fled to the coast. EO had come in at the beginning of 1996 and
retaken everything; the inventory of damage was under way. Whatever the rebels had
not looted, and it was looting of a lightweight kind, they had smashed; the major
pillage had been left to the Sierra Leone Army before, or as, the rescuing operation
took place, in collusion with the RUF. Truck parts, fridges, generators – all these were
removed, along with sections of conveyor belt from the bauxite plant, which were
shipped north to Guinea for resale. EO had set up in the rutile complex, camping out
in the ruined blocks daubed with the RUFs slogans:

Every day no matter that we go
we are the Lion of this kingdom,

warm the barrel, RUF black jesus in action.
Most of the rank and file were Angolans. The officers spent their days patrolling, talking to civilians, gleaning information, widening the net. Crucially, and confidentially, they were preparing logistics for an international aid agency to manage the return of roughly 8,000 displaced civilians. Without the provision of food, seeds, tools and the rudiments required to restart their communities again after an absence of a year, returning would be almost impossible. But the agency could not mount the operation without the help of EO. Nor could it be seen, any more than a prominent British politician, to have any association with a South African mercenary force. But anyone who wanted to do anything in this part of Sierra Leone – aid projects, plant recovery, damage assessment, or simple family farming – was dependent on the company for logistics or security.

Scattered around the district were other soldiers. There was the Sierra Leone Army, ragged and disorderly, moving in small detachments that would be better confined to barracks. There were also the hunters, whose traditional militia EO worked with very closely. Then there were the Liberian soldiers, isolated groups of them, living by checkpoint levies and other kinds of coercion. You had early warning of their presence in the form of sinister dumb sentries placed in the road: one such admonishing figure I passed on several occasions included a phrenological head removed from the bauxite company’s medical clinic; the head was decked in bandanas and stuck on a pole draped with a curtain and plastic trinkets. It was on duty for a teenager with an automatic pistol, a wide-brimmed hat and a red and black scarf who spoke with an American lilt and ran a little fiefdom around the perimeter of the bauxite plant. Another bad object, rigged up by the Sierra Leone Army, was part of a roadblock proper: it consisted of a frayed shirt-sleeve and two human skulls, one covered in glossy grey enamel paint, set on an oil drum.

These were the tutelary forms under which the remnants of civilian life had been eked out for some time and it was a point of interest that EO didn’t demolish them. For the unkempt young men with weapons who tended them, the company’s arrival was a relief. The influx of food and the decline of banditry is a respite for bandits, too. Later they would have to worry about the next move – especially the Liberians, for whom there was no future at home. They welcomed and feared EO, who settled disputes pretty sharply and put an end to the parasitical dependency of the militias on unarmed locals. There was no point any longer in trying to live by the gun. Peace and beginnings of order were now restored and news of the restoration travelled fast, which was why the aid agency had flown in field workers with EO, in anticipation of a mass influx. One of the mining companies looked set to restart.

An anecdotal glimpse like this into EOs work tends only to redress the balance of scepticism in favour of the company. But its role as an autonomous operator is less important than its symptomatic character. Any appraisal of its business has to be weighed against the doings, and non-doings, of the governments, international organisations and capital formations that have contributed to the opening into which it has moved with such alacrity. If there were strong, consensual political and social institutions in Angola or Sierra Leone, EO would have no place in either. If, during the eighties, there had not been such a slavish construction put upon the virtuous market and the vicious state – and what was the World Bank advocating during that catastrophic period in Africa? – EO and its clients would have been unable to reconceive the role of national security as a superlucrative tender. If the growing ambiguity between the public and corporate domains were not so advanced, EO could not shuttle so gainfully between the two. If the UN, under two dilatory
Secretaries-General and an abdicationist permanent membership, had not failed so badly in Africa since Namibian independence, there would be fewer security vacuums for EO and others to fill – and those others scarcely bear comparison, from a civilian point of view, with EO. Would arrangements be preferable under a Nigerian-led contingent from Ecomog, an underpaid unit of the Sierra Leone Army, or a gang led by a Liberian adolescent with a handgun?

There are problems enough with EOs work to date, if journalists go to jail and others are left wondering what national resources are being traded away in their name. Its open intervention against the RUF was instrumental in the holdings of the Sierra Leone elections, but there were covert manoeuvres, too, a week before the pre-election coup, as additional EO men were drafted into the country. Nobody is quite sure what went on. In this instance the shift was towards democracy – and there is now civilian rule – but the model might hold good for any client state heading in an unacceptable direction. The extent of the gratitude felt by many in Freetown and other parts of the country for EOs presence is shocking to any outsider who suspects that the presence of former apartheid specialist forces freelancing around Africa is an unhealthy state of affairs; EO jeopardises its popularity by failing to disclose its financial and contractual arrangements, and its hidden hand in national affairs, despite the rousing talk about democracy.

Yet the real issues will be raised later. EO wants to diversify out of purely mercenary business wherever it can. It is always on the look-out for post-conflict work: security, military training, reconstruction and the enormously lucrative logistics of rehabilitation; it is cultivating expertise in water projects, road building, housing, tourism, conservation, clinical care and medical supply, perhaps extensive farming. As these contracts come in, which they seem to be doing in Mozambique and lately Zambia, the company and its strange family relation, Strategic Resource Corporation, can go forth and multiply, if necessary in the guise of little companies with exotic names, many of them registered in the countries concerned. This sort of corporate growth is nothing new, but it is a century or more since an expansionist enterprise in Africa was so explicitly linked to a competent mercenary force, and perhaps just as long since African politics experienced the levels of vulnerability that many states on the continent are facing today.

Not long ago, there was talk at EO of going into Sudan. Its rule of working with legitimate governments would have meant co-operation with one of the worst regimes on the continent. Tony Buckingham was said to be in favour, but more cautious voices prevailed. There is noting to guarantee that they will in future. EO, moreover, is probably the market leader in Africa for the kind of work it offers; there will be other companies with different ground rules and similar ambitions, following the scent of money in a continent where few states can protect their assets or their citizens and some are run with no intention of doing so. The immediate effects of this proliferation will be diverse and unpredictable, but in the longer term, the growth of large freelance security forces in Africa is liable to strengthen the ruthless rather than the weak – a trend that was obvious long before the rise of Executive Outcomes.

Jeremy Harding is an assistant editor on the London Review of Books. This is an edited and updated version of an article that first appeared in the LRB in 1996.
Legitimacy, Land & Democracy in Niger

Christian Lund

Niger experienced two major political reforms since 1986: a land tenure reform, a Rural Code, aimed at increasing security for the rural population through a codification and formalisation of indigenous land rights, followed by constitutional democracy in the early 1990s. Both reforms aimed at securing some basic rights and were expected to confer legitimacy on the state. The conjuncture of the two, however, unleashed an intensive political struggle, competition over jurisdiction between politico-legal institutions and the decline of legitimacy of state institutions.

Introduction

In several African states democracy and political pluralism have been celebrated new developments in the 1990s. In Niger, 17 years of military and one-party rule was thus in 1991 replaced by a sovereign National Conference which issued a new constitution operating with multi-party democracy. Hopes were high that a democratic government would replace the autocratic one-party rule and would endow the state with a new legitimacy.

Democracy rests to some degree on accountability and open competition for political support which became omnipresent since the death of president Kountché in 1987. Political debate and competition grew intense, particularly, the confrontation between the Mouvement National pour la Société de Développement (MNSD), representing the old regime and an alliance of parties with Convention Démocratique et Sociale (CDS) as the most prominent one, arguing for ‘change’.

The area where the immediate political pay off was highest was one where the political competition also put the credibility and legitimacy of the new political system most at risk, namely the legal procedures and in particular those concerning disputes over land. Land tenure had been highly actualized as a political issue since 1986 with the announcement of a tenure reform, a Rural Code – securing rights in land by transforming traditional rights of tenure into private ownership. The task of overseeing this adaptation of the tenure regime was put into the hands of a new local tenure commission (Endnote 1). The conjuncture of democratization, on the one hand, and land tenure as a political issue, and its effects on the legitimacy of the legal institutions on the other, is the focus of this article.

Legitimacy and Politicization in the Context of Legal Pluralism

The politicization of the legal procedures raises important questions about the correspondence between legitimacy and effective jurisdictions. As Moore (1988:170) puts it:
In analyzing the legitimacy of a state one must keep distinct at least two aspects: 1) the nature of the claim to legitimacy and 2) the motives of its citizens when they are subject to authority.

Reinstating a democratic constitution makes legality the overall reference point for the state's legitimacy. This is particularly true for its legal institutions. Legitimacy of state institutions implies a recognition and thus an appreciation of them, and this is intimately linked to the concepts of justice and propriety. Completely opportunistic and situational submission to a state institution and erratic recognition of its jurisdiction can hardly be considered effects of legitimacy. The litmus test of an institution's legitimacy would thus be that its decisions are generally accepted even in spite of them being unfavourable for meeting immediate specific interests.

In Niger, as in most African societies, the institutional and normative structures for managing disputes are plural and often quite ambiguous. The colonization and modernization processes engenders a split in the legal system between state law and more customary regulation of social life. The colonial and independent government administration inculcated this dichotomy in the legal system, but the two types of law were rarely internally consistent. Research has demonstrated that the notion of indigenous law as a consistent, comprehensive and unchanging corpus of rules is illusory (Berry, 1993; Bruce, 1986:14-17; Chanock, 1991; Ranger, 1983; le Roy, 1991:109) (Endnote 2). Rather, the legal system must be viewed in terms of legal pluralism or legal polycentricity. Bentzon (1991:266) puts it lucidly:

The polycentric character of the law presents itself by the fact that different authorities in different fields of regulation use different sources of law in different orders.

This often engenders incongruence and competition over jurisdiction between the various institutions and ambiguity and contradictions in terms of which principles should be applied. Consequently, in such a context, social conflicts, and indeed disputes over land, have implications on several levels.

Comaroff and Roberts (1981) focus upon how different rules are invoked in disputes. To this end, they focus on the manifold rules pertaining to a specific area and see it as a normative repertoire. Based upon research in Botswana, they reject the notion of Tswana law as an internally consistent code and see it as a loosely-constructed repertoire of norms. This repertoire offers a wide set of rules for most situations, however they seem not to constitute a differentiated hierarchy and the norms are of varying specificity (Comaroff & Roberts, 1981:70-106). Consequently, in a dispute, different norms can be invoked to support competing arguments. The norms are not necessarily incompatible but are invoked so as to impose rival constructions on agreed facts. They are, thus, neither inherently contradictory nor compellingly complementary. Yet they are, however, brought into conflict by virtue of the strategic and pragmatic contingencies that arise out of conflicts of interests.

Quite often the different elements of this normative repertoire are embedded in different politico-legal institutions. Disputes may therefore be dealt with in a range of forums of which the formal judiciary is not the only and sometimes not the most significant one (Endnote 3). Consequently, parties in dispute are often in a position where they 'shop for forums' (Beckmann, 1981). In case of institutional incongruence this can prove to be a serious challenge to the institutions' legitimacy; if the plaintiff is dissatisfied, he will take his 'justice-business' elsewhere. These forums or institutions compete over jurisdictions. Thus, disputes between individuals may be transformed and confrontation absorbed into a broader enduring political competition between
institutions and groups. In that case, any settlement has far-reaching implications and the original dispute becomes symbolic for the political competition over jurisdictions. While legal reform can be seen as the government’s attempt to increase predictability and order, the process of formation and transformation of law is best understood as occurring in a semi-autonomous social field where several institutions operate. Thus, while the land tenure reform was issued by the government of Niger, the formation of land tenure rules in practice is the result of polymorphous institutional competition or governance.

It would not be reasonable to expect the Nigerien military regime to turn into a democratic state overnight and thereby endow its institutions, in particular its legal institutions, with a new legitimacy. But the question is whether the process of democratization coinciding with the tenure reform was conducive for endowing the legal institutions with increasing legitimacy or not.

In the following I shall outline the Nigerien background for raising this question. First, the legal system concerned with land tenure and the process which put land tenure high up on the political agenda will be described. Thereafter, I shall sketch out the nature of the political competition at the local level which greatly influenced the legal processing of tenure disputes.

Background

Land Tenure

Land tenure had only quite recently and gradually regained access to the political agenda. During the military regime, president Kountché in 1974 declared that the land belonged to the tiller of the soil. It was declared that all land, no matter how it had been acquired and no matter under which tenure rules it was held should henceforth belong as private property to the person cultivating it. This provoked conflicts between users and owners of the land in which the latter defied the declaration and insisted that a tithe be paid in recognition of their ownership. Many conflicts arising from Kountché’s declaration were not resolved. In 1977 the government issued a decree prohibiting any land tenure dispute resolution by any local authority - governmental or traditional leading to a situation of precarious stability. Tithe was often still paid recognizing that the land belonged to the owner and not to the cultivator – a defiance of the Kountché decree. However, the ‘use rights holder’ stayed on the land (for details see Ngaido, 1996; Lund, 1995).

Since all institutions had been stripped of their authority in land tenure questions by the government, no conflict had a predictable course and none of the institutions operating in the rural areas had formal powers to deal with land conflicts. However, neither conflicts, their sources nor the institutions disappeared, but all became much more discreet and informal. Generally, six different types of politico-legal institutions were the targets of the plaintiffs for settlement of conflicts. While all were informally involved in disputes, each institution had its primary domain: the administrative structure with the Préfet the Sous-préfet and the Chef de Poste; the traditional structure with the Sultan, the Chef de Canton and the Chef de Village for the sedentary farming communities and the Chef de Groupement and Chef de Tribu for the original pastoral, now largely sedentarised, communities; the legal structure with the courts; the police with the gendarmerie; and finally, the Kadi heading the religious structure interpreting the Islamic law.
The formal prohibition of any of these institutions dealing with tenure meant that while each institution was organized hierarchically, only a tacit hierarchy existed between them; thus, the administrative hierarchy made the Canton chiefs the auxiliary staff of the Sous-Préfet. Complementarity as well as competition between different illicit but effective jurisdictions characterized the legal system.

In 1986 a process of establishing a new land tenure reform, the Rural Code, was undertaken. The reinstatement of land tenure was then on the political agenda during the National Conference in 1991. Characteristic of the Conference was the proposed reversal of almost any law or decree passed during the military regime. All remnants of the old regime were ‘foul’ and should give way for ‘change’. And although it was not part of the final declaration, it had been voiced, and heard, that now was the time for people to claim the property that they had lent or hired to others and subsequently lost due to the Kountché decree. As the tenure disputes were no longer illegal, the tacit hierarchy going from the Chef de Village over the Chef de Canton to the Sous-Préfet was now recognized as an official hierarchy for dispute settlements with the Juge de Paix as the final instance if a settlement could not be obtained. Complementarity and competition did, however, not disappear.

Political Competition

While social and political struggle are immanent in all societies, overt contestation of government and public political competition are not. During the military regime from 1974 to 1991 only the military’s party, MNSD, was authorized, managing to quell political opposition until the death of president Kountché in 1987. From the late 1980s, however, a number of organizations began to operate under politically innocent names and programmes. One of these, the Association Mutualiste d’Animation Culturelle et Artistique (AMACA), was established in 1989 by intellectuals from the country’s second city – Zinder. The real objectives were to protect the interests of these predominantly Zinder-Hausa civil servants against the historical Djerma favouritism prevailing in the state apparatus and to favour their region – Zinder – in national development. The modus operandi of this organization quickly became one of mutual help and defence against abuse from the authorities with AMACA recruiting extensively among non-intellectuals as well. Thus, people found in AMACA intellectuals who would assist them when they encountered trouble with government officials or traditional chiefs; with an AMACA-militant by the side, a farmer was less liable to be subjected to the arbitrariness of a gendarme looking for a bribe or Canton chief trying to expropriate their land. Furthermore, if a farmer was arrested with illegally cut wood the leaders of AMACA in Zinder would raise the funds among members to pay the fine, facilitated by the membership of wealthy businessmen from Zinder town. They would pay the small fine of 2,000 FCFA, get the delinquent out of trouble and in return receive his loyalty. The businessman, on the other hand, could count on AMACA if his truck full of goods from Nigeria was held back at the customs
office. In a matter of hours AMACA could mobilize hundreds of militants who would harass the customs officers to release the goods. This setup was very dynamic; AMACA delivered what the members needed without being too fussy about the legality of its acts.

In 1993 multi-party elections were held for the first time in decades and AMACA converted itself into a political party, the CDS. During the political campaign prior to the elections, the official CDS slogans were centred around bringing justice back to the people and fighting government officials' abuse of power. During the heat of the campaign, slogans and tempting policy promises were often given an extra twist to become more catchy for the rural electorate: abolition of the traditional chieftaincy, the forest guards and taxation; a retrial of all unjust trials made by the MNSD-controlled administrators and traditional chiefs. In particular, the propaganda suggested that land lost due to expropriation or rigged trials conducted by the traditional chiefs were to be handed back. Though not formally committed to these promises by any official programme, when the CDS won the elections, these promises made were largely retained by the rural population, including the issue of land.

CDS won the majority in parliament in a coalition with two other parties. In its nomination of Présidents, Sous-Présidents and other important civil servants in the administration, party members were preferred and a tacit quotation system between the coalition parties was established. In the Arrondissement of Mirriah, the Sous-Préfet put into office was accordingly out of the CDS quota. It is important to stress, however, that while democratization brought about intense political competition at the local level, the political and administrative players were not accountable to any local democratic institution, since local assemblies had not been established.

The arrival of a very dynamic, delivering and populist party, which contrary to the MNSD, was separable from the state itself in the sense that it drew its legitimacy from attacks on the state, added a competing institutional option for dispute settlement to the range of options already in place (as the following cases will demonstrate).

Three Cases

I shall present two cases to illustrate the political party CDS' insertion in the legal procedures. A third case serves to illustrate the manoeuvring of the Sous-Préfet in a situation where his various capacities elevated him out of bureaucratic control and into an extended discretionary terrain (all names and locations below the Arrondissement level are pseudonyms). The influence of the political parties is exercised in several ways. It ranges from simple brokerage between a plaintiff and some public authority, over conducting hearings and providing settlements under a quasi-formal ritual, to more stealthily activating party members holding key positions within the administration thus capable of influencing the outcome.

Settlements

A land tenure dispute had occurred between Saley and Djibo in a village in the Canton de Gao in 1994. Saley had claimed some land back from Djibo who denied that Saley had any such rights. When Saley had first tried to let Djibo be summoned at the Chef de Canton's court for settlement of the dispute, Djibo had managed to pay off the bailiff not to be able to find him. Subsequently the case was postponed and Djibo was allowed to cultivate the land if he managed to plant his crop before the case was reopened.
When the rainy season began, however, both Djibo and Saley began to cultivate – one planting on what the other had planted. Saley went to the Chef de Canton who dismissed him referring to the commenced cropping season marking the closure of the season for land litigation. Saley then went to the local member of parliament, Yacouba Mato, to complain. Yacouba Mato suggested patience and to take up the case next year. Dissatisfied with this advice, Saley went to consult one of the more militant CDS cadres, Zakari Ousseini, and explained his situation. Zakari Ousseini and an associate of his went with Saley to the village where Djibo was taken by surprise. Zakari Ousseini scolded Djibo for not respecting a summons, and then he let both parties present their case. After having heard them, Zakari Ousseini asked Saley to take a Koranic oath that the land was his property which he did. At first Djibo accepted and ceded the field in question to Saley; later, after having consulted friends and relatives, Djibo mounted enough courage to go to the Chef de Canton to complain about the procedure. The Chief dismissed him referring to the cropping season, and suggested that Djibo took up the case with the Sous-Préfet after the harvest.

Several elements in this course of events merit a comment. First, it is obvious that the CDS cadres do not subscribe to a uniform approach towards demands for their intervention. And Zakari Ousseini used the occasion to compete with Yacouba Mato in rendering justice. He most likely scored a few points against Yacouba Mato as the committed cadre who could not ignore injustice. Second, the combination of surprise, the authority of the president’s party and the use of the Koran and the Koranic oath whose legal validity cannot be disputed without the risk of losing one’s honour, made it virtually impossible for Djibo to oppose the procedure and the result. Third, when the Chef de Canton learnt about the settlement and Zakari Ousseini’s and CDS’ involvement, he transferred the reopening of the case because the chiefs ‘do not do politics’, and directed it towards the Sous-Préfecture.

When discussing the case with Ousseini, he denied having conducted a legal procedure; he would, as he said, never do that – he was not an official authority. He had merely witnessed a farmer take an oath, since no other authority [sic!] was willing to assist and endow the ceremony with an official tinge. However, while the procedure was only a simulation of an officially recognized legal procedure, it was effective and real enough to make the land change hands, at least for one cropping season. Discussing the case with the Sous-Préfet, he stated that the incident was not unique:

"The formal hierarchy is 'burnt' [brulée/not respected] all the time and the political parties intervene and set themselves up as a parallel justice. It is nonsense."

Nevertheless, he knew about the actual case but had not reacted upon it. He had, as he said, not been informed, by that, meaning not informed in a way he could not ignore.

Activating Party Influence on Key Positions in the Administration

A tenure dispute had come about between Mamane and Idi in a village in the Canton de Gao. Mamane’s mother and her brother, Ali, had inherited their father’s land sometime in the 1930s. Ali then went on a pilgrimage to Mecca, left the land with his sister, and never returned. In 1951 Idi’s father returned from his pilgrimage to Mecca stating that he had met Ali, and that Ali had lent him the land he had inherited in the 1930s. Mamane’s mother refused at first, but when Idi’s father had her summoned before the Sultan of Zinder and produced witnesses to his and Ali’s agreement, she
ceded the field to him as a loan. When Idi’s father died in 1973, Mamane addressed Idi to claim the field. Idi now refused, that the field was only a loan, and a court settlement in Zinder ensued. Here, the same witnesses as in 1951 testified that the field was indeed a loan. Idi nevertheless requested to continue to cultivate the land for another year, granting him time to find another field. Mamane conceded to this. In 1974 the military coup brought Kountché into power. When he first declared that the land belonged to the tiller of the soil, and in 1977 prohibited any local or traditional authority from dealing with tenure matters, Mamane had to let the case lie.

The case erupted again in 1992 when Mamane claimed the land back. Not able to reach a settlement, the Chef de Canton transferred the dispute to the magistrate in Zinder. Idi managed to produce a number of postponements, but in the end a court session was held and the magistrate settled the case by granting Mamane the land. At this point the magistrate issued a preliminary, handwritten court ruling, stating that the land should return to Mamane.

Idi was not satisfied with the situation – losing the land his family had cultivated since the 1950s. As he was one of the village’s known CDS supporters, he went to the Yaccouba Mato, MP in Mirriah to ask for help. Yaccouba Mato refused since the magistrate had already issued a preliminary ruling; Idi then went to Zakari Ousseini. He, in turn, accompanied Idi to the CDS polit bureau in Zinder where, a CDS cadre took him to the Préfet. After having heard him, the Préfet telephoned to the Sous-Préfet in Mirriah and urged him to do something. The Préfet suggested that Idi summon Mamane before the Sous-Préfet, which he did. At the scheduled hearing, the Sous-Préfet told Mamane that the settlement granting him the land was valid for the present year only, and that the dispute would be tried again after the harvest. He added this on the magistrate’s handwritten court ruling which Mamane kept. The case was suspended again and awaited the reopening of the season for land litigation the following year.

The first thing to notice about a case like this is that it dates so far back and contains no written contracts between the opposed parties that simple proof is difficult to produce. While mutually contradictory, neither of the parties’ arguments were completely unreasonable or improbable.

Second, the dispute had, by the intervention of the magistrate, reached a level of authority which was no match for at simple settlement by a local party cadre as in the previous case. It required not only the intervention of from a high ranking government official – the Sous-Préfet – but even the leverage from his superior. The Sous-Préfet demonstrated developed skills for walking on a razor’s edge. On the one hand, he owed it to the party and his superior to take action at their request. His endurance and promotion chances lay in the hands of the CDS so long as the quotation system worked and the CDS was in power. On the other hand, once the case fell within the magistrate’s jurisdiction, he no longer had a formal say. The comments he added on the preliminary transcript on the court ruling was therefore not a direct contradiction of the magistrate’s decision – only a restriction of it’s validity to one year and an announcement of a forthcoming appeal. The Sous-Préfet managed to fashion his intervention in a way in which everybody – the disputing parties, the CDS and the magistrate – knew he was disapproving. He effectively suspended the magistrate’s decision but still prevented the him from denouncing his actions publicly. As the magistrate explained:
If I took his illegal behaviour seriously and denounced it, it would only mean that the people would take it even more seriously and accept it as something important. The legal terms are even misspelled and it is an entire nonsense.

The magistrate might have been right in that open contestation of the Sous-Préfet’s behaviour would merely have endowed it with more importance; on the other hand, ignoring it did not undo it either. The intervention by the Sous-Préfet could turn out to be successful, since the case was pending until the magistrate was transferred to another district. A new magistrate might possibly review the case differently considering the plausibility of both litigants’ versions.

Room for Manoeuvre for the Sous-Préfet

A dispute occurred over a cattle corridor in a village in the Canton of Gao. Omar and a group of villagers neighbouring the corridor had objected to its use by the cattle of Saley and a group of villagers. When Omar prohibited Saley’s use, Saley contacted the Sous-Préfecture in order to complain. The Sous-Préfet went to the village accompanied by two Gardes Républicains. A meeting was held in the village and resulted in Omar accepting Saley’s use of the corridor. The Sous-Préfet declared that the sanctity of the corridor was henceforth protected by the Koran. Two weeks later, Omar began to plant in the corridor, and the dispute erupted again. Saley notified the Sous-Préfet who sent the Assistant Sous-Préfet instructing him to arrest and bring back to Mirriah anyone who disregarded his earlier decision.

At the village a heated debate ensued with the occasional intervention from the two republican guards separating the most agitated hot heads with the rifle butts. The Assistant Sous-Préfet demanded that the earlier decision was respected. Unable to reach a settlement and unwilling to arrest half of the male population in the village, the Assistant Sous-Préfet scheduled a new hearing in Mirriah for the coming Friday, three days away.

On the Friday, two groups of about 20 men came from the village to the hearing. However, between Tuesday and Friday a delegation from the village representing Omar Moussa had made contact with the Sous-Préfet at his home. On Friday, the Sous-Préfet gathered the two groups from the village in the square of the Sous-Préfecture and declared that while the cattle corridor had once been respected as such, it was never a proper corridor. Therefore Omar and his neighbours could rightfully extend their fields into the corridor and cancel it. And if anyone let his animals stray on to the former corridor, it would be considered illegal crop damage. The Sous-Préfet reminded the two groups that Saley had used the Koran to protect his fields, and he expected all good Muslims to respect that. He then closed the meeting and sent people home. Saley later made contact with the CDS polit bureau and the dispute continued.

While the tenure commission, presided by the Sous-Préfet, had once settled the affair in favour of protection of the cattle corridor and the free use of it, the Sous-Préfet now undid this decision. When asked, the Assistant Sous-Préfet could not state a clear reason but suggested that the Sous-Préfet had stepped out of his authority as a member and president of the tenure commission and had assumed his role as the Sous-Préfet. Overruling the tenure commission’s decision from this position would not be questioned although the Sous-Préfet was not formally entitled to do so. No member of the tenure commission felt capable of challenging the Sous-Préfet, and preferred to ignore the incident.
Exploring the Paradoxes

Invocation of State Capacities by Citizens

The political competition between the different institutions involved in dispute resulted in strategies aimed at extending jurisdictions; for instance, to conduct legal procedures and decide and rule in cases of tenure disputes. The individual litigants made use of the considerable number of institutions and took cases from one institution to another. Thus, state control or arbitration were requested by the citizens, and not merely inflicted upon them. This is an interesting point in the discussion about the retreat of the state and the uncaptured peasantry. Hyden (1983) argued that the peasantry evaded state control and retreated into the economy of affection. This produced a long debate in *Development & Change* on the economic integration of the small-holder farmers (Kasfir, 1986; Cliffe, 1987; Hyden, 1987). It would appear that in the case of law and regulation of rights, some kind of socio-legal umpire is desired by rural citizens. This also goes somewhat against the statements of Etienne le Roy (1984:19; 1990:114) who argues that in African societies disputes are preferably dealt with without official interference. It may be that litigants avoid the courts and the legal system, but the cases above nevertheless indicate that some kind of authority ‘outside’ the litigants themselves are readily solicited.

From Outside to Inside and the Change of Tactics

The CDS experienced considerable political progress, but also began to be caught up by its own success. The political actions of challenging the state and the traditional chiefs by mounting pressure and erecting parallel justice were once valiant guerilla tactics. During the Kountché period, the state was run by an unconstitutional party created and controlled by the military, and political sabotage had a kind of ‘Robin Hood-legitimacy’ to it. Although the AMACA/CDS interference with the administration of justice was often as arbitrary as the administration’s operation itself, it was seen as committed efforts to redress injustice.

Later, however, the same tactics had different connotations. When the CDS occupied the presidency of the republic and was a major partner in the coalition government, it had to abide by the constitution and thus had to recognize the separation of the legislative, executive and judiciary state powers in order not to become a replica of the old regime. Paradoxically, the rules and logics of democracy seem to counteract this: elected into office, parties and politicians were there for one term at a time. In order to become re-elected they had to deliver political results, but the quagmire of the Nigerien economy made, and makes, it an impossible task for any government to deliver much in the way of tangible economic and social progress within one term. Therefore it was tempting to maintain the status quo for popular support and satisfy the electorate through populist policies of conspicuously redressing injustice.

Supplement to, Rather than Replacement of, Politico-legal Institutions

It is often argued that rights in land in African societies are most often claimed by virtue of membership or status in various social groups and that these claims are renegotiated in the process of changing political relations and social identities (Okoth-Ogendo, 1979:156-58; Berry, 1993:104). Viewed from this angle, democracy has not changed access rules to land. CDS merely erected itself as a ‘political tribe’ in opposition to the former political power – MNSD. ‘Membership’ of the CDS became important for land claims which was rapidly recognized by the electorate. By first
appearance, the support for CDS in the rural areas seemed overwhelming, but when probing for reasons for the adherence to the party, the current answer was that it is wise to back a winner, and when questioning the difference between the CDS and the MNSD, the standard answer was: ‘CDS has the power now’. It does not, however, confer legitimacy upon the legal system itself or CDS as its prime governor. The alternative avenues to justice were not abandoned; the Sous-Préfet, the Canton chief and the magistrate were still addressed for complaints or appeals, and the litigants shopped for the most promising legal forum for a favourable settlement. In this sense, the CDS option simply widened this range of options.

However, it is one thing that people did not go to the CDS because they considered it a legitimate state institution capable of exercising justice, but because the party was considered the opportune avenue for the specific situation; it is quite another if the party itself was promoting state legitimacy, or not. Increasing the number of legal avenues does not in itself wear on the state’s legitimacy. However, since revoking earlier decisions by other institutions was an important exercise of justification for the CDS, considerable institutional incongruence was produced. Furthermore, this reflected neither a consensus about the rule of law or consensus about the authority exercising it since different norms had been applied and all other legal institutions had, with more or less success, been overruled by the CDS. Therefore, although it may have been the intention, the operation was not effectively conducive for endowing the legal institutions with increasing legitimacy. Rather, it seems as if the modus operandi contributed to its erosion. While conscious about this, the party cadres in Mirriah and Zinder had difficulties in avoiding it for two reasons. First, while the CDS had won the elections, the corrupt behaviour of chiefs and administrators, which CDS campaigned against, had not disappeared, and it was tempting to use a new favourable position to redress injustice by overruling formally responsible institutions. Second, refraining from this kind of intervention would have invited someone else to do it.

Pluralism and Reduced Accountability

Another paradox is rooted in the way democratization had replaced the one-party command over the administration with a manifest competition over the executive, and thereby the judiciary, and between the party politicians and the party appointed civil servants, namely the Sous-Préfet. Since the governing party no longer had complete control over the administration but also had a constitution to respect, the Sous-Préfets could now manoeuvre between two masters – the constitution and their party. The local CDS party cadres claimed that they had a legitimate right to control and oversee the operations of the local administrator who traditionally had transgressed the limits of his formal attributions extensively. They even competed to be the more zealous umpire. The Sous-Préfet, on the other hand, claimed that while he was neutral, CDS involvement and control was undue politicization. The paradox is, that while democratization had loosened the ruling political party’s grip on the administration and the Sous-Préfet, the failure to submit him to control from a new democratic institution released his powers, and a new ambiguous dimension of legal procedures came about.

While this apparently was competition between CDS and the administration, the controversy actually went on within the party since the Sous-Préfet was a CDS party member. And since the reassertion of power for both the Sous-Préfet and the local CDS politicians in general rested considerably upon their active intervention and delivery of ‘justice’, the bitter irony was that regardless who proved to be the most
powerful local actor, it tended to be at the expense of the legitimacy of the state's local legal institutions.

By Way of Conclusion
Political developments since the late 1980s made it easier for the citizen to question the socio-political order if dissatisfied with a specific ruling. They could always appeal to another politico-legal institution. The increasing scarcity of land, and, in particular, the re-emergence of tenure as a contestation of rights following the announcement of the Rural Code, were the driving forces behind the competition over access. Disputes often concerned the nature of transactions which dated back when unequivocal exactitude was neither required nor desired since land resources were more plentiful and transactions could hold multiple meanings. These transactions, which historically required less formal intervention from state institutions, now frequently became the objects of legal processing.

This state regulation of tenure disputes was not only accompanied by extension of the activities of the legal or administrative authorities but by the invocation of state capacities in existing and emerging institutions. This was accompanied by a decrease in the legitimacy of the politico-legal institutions in general. The institutional incongruence signified a weakening of the rule-bound relations between the various institutions, and thereby better chances of replacing one interpretation of justice with another when soliciting another politico-legal institution. The competition over control between the politico-legal institutions further emphasized this discrepancy, and as a result it became easier not to submit to a legal decision which went against immediate specific interests.

This had consequences for social stratification. The increased formalization of dispute processing and development of state capacities in the different institutions meant that the extent to which politico-legal institutions possessed authority to grant or deny users from access increased. In terms of social stratification; those best able to mobilize politico-legal authorities would most likely be better qualified to secure access to land than those less able to mobilize one of the authorities.

Epilogue
The incongruity between the ideal claims to legitimacy and the actual motives for submission to state and party institutions is not reserved for the Nigerien experience, rather it could be argued that it is a general schism of any state. Berry argues that negotiability of rules and relationships is one of the fundamental characteristics of African societies (Berry, 1993). Indeed, the cases presented above seem to confirm her statement. I think, however, it could be successfully argued that negotiability is what characterizes any society and the form it takes is what distinguishes them. When democracy was introduced as the new legitimate form of social negotiation, it seems to have suffered from the impossible modern ambition of state building; that society must henceforth be conducted within the framework of democracy rather than the opposite; that democracy was inserted into society with already existing forms of negotiation. This seems to have affected the other ambitious modernization effort – the Rural Code.

The African continent has witnessed a large number of land tenure reforms over the past four decades. Many of them have aimed at replacing the existing customary
tenure regimes by completely new conditions for access, control and transfer of land. Common for the societies which have gone through these reforms, be they nationalization with leasehold (Burkina Faso, Guinea, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, Somalia, Zaire) privatization (Kenya) or some sort of cooperativization (Tanzania, Ethiopia), have been a remarkable resilience of the indigenous tenure systems (Bruce, 1986; 1989; Bruce & Freudenberger, 1992; Williams, 1996). They have not been easy to replace. Moreover, most of the 'replacement reforms' have proven rather costly. On the other hand, reforms like the Nigerien Rural Code, or the Plans Fonciers (tenure survey) of Côte d'Ivoire or Benin have followed an 'adaptation-paradigm'. Here the tenure system is being reformed and adapted to the present situation with increasing land pressure etc. in a more incremental way. This offers the distinct advantages of being less costly and a less radical break with the practices known by the community. The Nigerien experience nevertheless show that although incremental, adaptive and modest, reforms of codifying and registering indigenous tenure regimes can be highly contentious. And in conjuncture with political crises or transformations such reforms can develop into serious challenges to the legitimacy of the state itself.

While the Rural Code was, and still is, an effort to modernize the land tenure system by formalizing rights in land through local negotiations and tenure commissions and thereby increase tenure security, politicization and competition between the involved institutions led to increasing insecurity. Not only did democracy question the authority of the traditional institutions, but the intense political competition engendered unpredictability at a higher pace. As a piece of social engineering the Rural Code still seems to be some considerable way from the desired outcome. The military coup in early 1996 and a return to a democratic constitution suggests that the political confusion of the legal system is not receding in any noticeable way.

Christian Lund is at the University of Roskilde, Denmark.

Endnotes

1. The tenure commission is composed of the Sous-Préfet who presides over it; the Secrétaire permanent du Code Rural (in the case of Mirriah the Chef de Service de l'Environnement), the heads of the local ministerial departments concerned with rural development, the traditional chiefs concerned and representatives of the farmers', the herders' the women's and the youth organizations. The commission is supposed to conciliate in tenure disputes and oversee the establishment of the 'dossier rural' for a piece of land – the transitional tenurial stage leading to private property (Comité National du Code Rural 1993: art 1 and 116-21).

2. Moreover, research on legal systems in Europe and America has reached analogue conclusions that Western legal systems should also be conceptualised as several elements of regulation and control which draw on the symbols of the law (Merry, 1988: 874; Galanter, 1981:20; Fitzpatrick, 1983:162).

3. As Galanter (1981:3) points out: 'Courts resolve only a small fraction of all disputes that are brought to their attention. These are only a small fraction of all the disputes that might conceivably be brought to court and even a smaller fraction of the whole universe of disputes'.
References


Areas of Niger: the Case of Kollo Arrondissement


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The 1996 Zambian Elections: Still Awaiting Democratic Consolidation

Carolyn Baylies and Morris Szeftel

On 18 November 1996 presidential and parliamentary elections were held for the second time under Zambia's Third Republic. The first elections, in October 1991, ended the unbroken grip on power enjoyed by the United National Independence Party (UNIP) since 1964 and returned the country to a multi-party political system after 18 years as a one-party state. UNIP was heavily defeated by the MMD (Movement for Multiparty Democracy) and Kenneth Kaunda, the country's president since 1964, was replaced by Frederick Chiluba. The peaceful nature of the changeover in 1991 was applauded locally and internationally. There was a sense of optimism about the country's democratic prospects. Zambia was widely held up as a model of successful democratic transition and aid flowed in, partly in support of the democratic experiment and partly because of the new regime's commitment to economic liberalisation and structural adjustment. In some cases donor support was specifically earmarked for the promotion of good government and the encouragement of civic education (Endnote 1).

In a number of ways, the 1996 elections thus represented an important test of the progress of Zambia's democracy and a measure of the degree to which democratic consolidation had occurred. They were also, as competitive elections are supposed to be, an opportunity to legitimate the multi-party system and renew the leadership's mandate. And they were an opportunity to further consolidate and deepen democratic practice and democratic development. Yet the successful holding of a second set of free and fair elections is not, in itself, a sufficient measure of democratic consolidation. Following Beetham (1994) we would argue that a democratic system can be judged to be consolidated when it can demonstrate a capacity to withstand shocks and pressures (including opposition to the system itself) without undermining the electoral process or abandoning political freedoms. But we would equally endorse his argument that it is not just the conduct and outcome of an election which must be assessed but the extent to which consolidation is grounded in institutional development which ensures its viability and sustainability.

Taken by their outcome, the 1996 Zambian elections were a triumph for the ruling MMD. In the Presidential election, Chiluba was endorsed by 73% of those casting a ballot. Moreover, the MMD gained 131 of the 150 parliamentary seats, with its candidates capturing 60% of the total vote. The government thus increased its legislative majority. President Chiluba confidently declared that the results showed that Zambians were happy with the government's performance (The Post, 3 December 1996). Yet, despite this appearance, the elections were deficient as evidence of democratic consolidation. Although there were claims of irregularities in the conduct of the elections, it is not so much the poll itself as the circumstances under which it
was held which marred its outcome. In particular, the adoption of a new constitution, widely regarded as restricting political participation (Human Rights Africa/Watch 1996) was widely criticised. The constitutional provision which prevented Kaunda from standing for the presidency provoked particular international concern (Endnote 2). The registration of voters was equally contentious; according to some estimates it left almost half the potential electorate without registration cards. Finally, some local and foreign observers and members of opposition parties considered the electoral playing field not to have been level. There was suspicion that the new electoral commission lacked independence from government and, in any case, it was set up too close to the election to foster confidence in its efficiency, independence or integrity. Moreover, the MMD was accused by many observers of using its access to government resources and the state-controlled media to its disproportionate advantage.

The concerns raised about the organisation and framework of the elections led to external attempts to persuade the Zambian government to adopt a more transparently fair system. An unsuccessful eleventh hour appeal was made, for instance, by President Mandela of South Africa, in his capacity as chair of SADC, to postpone the elections until the deficiencies could be corrected and anomalies removed. The elections were also closely watched by the bilateral donors, some of whom levelled a number of public criticisms of performance deficiencies in the area of governance, focusing particularly on constitutional provisions and the voter registration exercise. Substantial donor assistance, particularly in the form of balance of payments support, was suspended during 1996, with the possibility being expressed of further withdrawal of support should the government not reverse its perceived anti-democratic tendencies and demonstrate its commitment to political freedoms, including freedom of expression and of political participation.

The international stage on which the 1996 elections thus took place reflected the dilemmas and contradictions which the elections posed for the relationship between government and international donors, affecting as they did the nature of aid given under political conditionality. In 1991, international creditors had responded positively to the MMD's message of democratic reform and market liberalisation. The MMD's commitment to multi-party democracy, constitutional reform, voter registration and a human rights commission won widespread approval and support. The democratic programme of the MMD attracted, in part, a high level of donor financial assistance after 1991 and with it, of course, a high level of international attention to Zambia's democratic progress.

This level of donor intervention in democracy-governance matters after 1991 irritated and, at times, offended the government, provoking an inclination to resist by going its own way and defining in its own terms the substance of democratic procedure. But Zambia's precarious economy, and dependence on external assistance, leaves its government vulnerable to leverage exerted by external players, leverage which they have at times tried to exercise. The MMD's electoral victory in 1996, therefore, was much tarnished by the strains in this relationship which it created.

It is within this broader context of the political process of democratisation that this article examines Zambia's 1996 elections (Endnote 3). After an analysis of the voting (drawing some comparisons with 1991), it will consider the extent to which the elections serve as a measure of democratic consolidation when situated in a broader analysis of the institutional and legislative developments which preceded them. The way in which these developments have been the focus of concern both among
political activists and the donor community ensures, we suggest, that the elections and their outcome have implications for local politics and subsequent donor behaviour.

The Development of Opposition to the MMD

There were as many as 35 political parties in Zambia prior to the 1996 elections, 11 of which were represented in the parliamentary contests – in a few cases in apparent defiance of their leadership’s declared boycott of the proceedings. Apart from UNIP, the most prominent opposition parties were headed by individuals who had been elected to Parliament on the MMD ticket in 1991, a number of them members of the first MMD Cabinet. Rodger Chongwe, of the Liberal Progressive Front (LPF) was the first MMD Minister of Legal Affairs (and architect of much of its early democratic reform programme). Guy Scott, who with the head of the Zambia National Farmers Union, Ben Kapita, founded the National Lima Party, had been the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. Humphrey Mulemba, head of the National Party, had been Minister of Mines and Mineral Development (and before that a UNIP Secretary General and a member of Kaunda’s cabinets!). Akashambatwa Mbikusita-Lewanika, head of the Agenda for Zambia (AZ), a founding member of MMD and one of its leading policy formulators, had been Minister of Science, Technology Education and Vocational Training. Dean Mung’omba and Derick Chitala, important figures in the founding of MMD, who now led the Zambia Democratic Congress, had been Deputy Ministers. MMD’s original success had stemmed from the way in which it brought together various strands of opposition to the UNIP regime but its early cohesion reflected more the widespread opposition to the status quo and to Kaunda’s dominance than to any unity of interests, ideological consensus or coherent economic strategy. Thus, it was always likely to fragment (Baylies and Szeftel, 1992) and spawn a number of opposition parties.

The years after 1991 saw the departure of 15 of its original 24 Cabinet members, through dismissal or resignation, 8 of whom subsequently contested by-elections as independents or members of opposition parties. The turnover of party members, especially at the upper levels, is indicated in part by the number of by-elections held – 45 between the 1991 elections and October of 1995. About half were a result of the deaths of sitting MPs but most of the remainder were a consequence of resignation from their party, in the great majority of cases from the MMD. Clearly this reflected dissent and discontent as well as, in some cases, thwarted ambition.

Despite these internal squabbles and splits, the MMD retained support across the country. The strength of this support varied by region and aroused accusations of regional and ethnic bias, with the MMD sometimes portrayed as a creature of Bemba-speaking leaders and its government as having at times a particularly heavy concentration of Luapulans within it. Yet for all the attempt of opposition parties to build national structures and a country-wide popular following, their bases of support tended to be much more regionally confined than that of the MMD.

While the formation of new parties within Zambia may be taken as a sign of enthusiasm for political participation, their number suggests the disparate and incoherent nature of the opposition. Some have been termed ‘briefcase parties’, essentially centred around one or a few individuals, with little support or viability. Others were more substantial. There were relatively few programmatic differences between them, but these were sometimes important. The National Lima Party, for instance, explicitly prioritised agricultural development. There were differences also
about the pace and extent of privatisation. Yet for the most part these were
outweighed by similarities of position not only between opposition parties but also
between them and the MMD. The opposition appeared more concerned to displace
the party in power than to effect a change of policy direction, especially with regard to
the economy. In many respects, their most significant differences with the
government were fundamentally political in nature - about the terms upon which
political participation occurs - rather than about socio-economic development.

Recognising that a divided opposition would assist the MMD, an initiative was
launched in mid 1996 to promote cooperation between the largest opposition parties
and to run a single, jointly agreed, presidential candidate against Chiluba. An alliance
was formed to oppose, among other things, the government's handling of the
constitution (The Post, 21 November 1996). But the ambitions of individual leaders,
and their mutual distrust, undermined it almost as soon as it was launched. When it
became evident that the constitution had been pushed through the National
Assembly, effectively barring former-president Kaunda from standing, UNIP
announced a boycott of the elections. This was honoured by the LPF (whose leader,
Roger Chongwe, chaired the alliance) but few of the other players. Had it been more
widely honoured, the validity of the elections might have been called into question.
As it was their participation conferred legitimacy on it and undermined the strength
of their later criticisms of its outcome. Dean Mung'omba, for the ZDC, for instance,
declared that his party had decided to participate in order to test the legitimacy of the
electoral process and demonstrate a commitment to pursue peaceful political means
(The Post, editorial comment, 20 November 1996). The more cynical might suggest that
such opposition parties, harbouring an exaggerated sense of their popular support,
decided to take advantage of the removal of UNIP from the contest.

Two UNIP candidates stood in apparent defiance of the boycott, as did one member of
the LPF. Four other parties fielded 5 or fewer candidates each. The Agenda for
Zambia, led by Mbikusita-Lewanika, ran 11 candidates (8 in Western Province) and
won two seats (in Seshihe and Mongu). The major opposition parties, however, were
the Zambia Democratic Congress, which fought 141 seats, the National Party which
fought 91 and the National Lima Party, the most recently formed, which contested 83.
In addition 99 individuals stood as Independent candidates, some of them having
resigned from MMD but not joined another group.

Results of the Election

The Parliamentary Contests

In the absence of UNIP, which boycotted the elections, the opposition proved
unsuccessful in their individual and collective challenge to the MMD. In some cases
this failure was particularly marked. The National Lima Party, for example, contested
83 constituencies but gained no seats and only 6.54% of the total vote. Its best
performance was in Chongwe where Guy Scott took 37% of the vote. The NLP won
20% or more of the vote in just 19 constituencies, coming second in all but one of these.
Its best showing was perhaps in the Southern Province (one of the centres of
agriculture in Zambia) where it placed second in five constituencies.

The National Party did slightly better in the overall vote than the NLP (with 7.26%)
and won 5 seats out of 98 contested. But its success was concentrated in Northwestern
Province (belying the claim embodied in its name) where it won four seats and placed
second in four others. NP candidates also placed second in 4 constituencies in
Western Province and one in Eastern Province. In most constituencies, though, they gained little more than 5% of the vote. The ZDC was the most widely represented of all opposition parties across the country, contesting 141 of 150 constituencies. While gaining a higher overall share of turnout than any other opposition party, its parliamentary vote (14%) was still dismally low. The party gained 20% or more of the total vote in just 32 constituencies (six of them two-party-only contests), winning two (both in Western Province), coming second in 29 and third in one.

Poor as the opposition's showing was in terms of winning votes, it was even more dismal with regard to turning votes into seats – especially in the case of the NLP and the ZDC. If the NP could claim slightly more success with five seats, its parliamentary representation (3.33%) was still well below its share of the vote (6.54%). This failure is highlighted further by the fact that independent candidates took 10 seats on a 10% share of the vote; all told, over half the opposition in the new assembly is provided by Independents.

In the vast majority of cases, MMD candidates obtained a clear majority over their combined opposition. In 104 seats, the government won with over 50% of the vote. However, there were 27 cases where the MMD won with only a plurality, where the presence of two or more opponents ensured the MMD's victory, allowing it to take 87% of seats on 60% of the total parliamentary vote. The lowest plurality was in Luangeni Constituency in Eastern Province where Solomon Mbuzi won for the MMD with just 31.96% against 5 other candidates. At the same time it must be noted that opposition candidates themselves seldom achieved unequivocal victories: only 7 of them gained over 50% of the vote.

If the MMD's victory was spread across the country, there were still notable pockets of opposition. The most important was in Northwestern Province, where National Party candidates won in 4 constituencies and were second in another four. Two constituencies in the province were won by Independents, so that, altogether, almost a third of MMD defeats occurred in Northwestern. In addition, Northwestern contained four of the 10 constituencies in which Chiluba received fewer votes than one of his opponents, in this case the NP leader, Mulemba. But even in Northwestern,

### Table 1. Results of 1996 Zambian Parliamentary Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats contested</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Seats</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agenda for Zambia (AZ)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8,982</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independents (I)</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>127,760</td>
<td>10.21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal Progressive Front (LPF)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement for Democratic Process (MDP)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD)</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>750,204</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>87.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Congress (NC)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2,313</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Lima Party (NLP)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>81,876</td>
<td>6.54</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Party (NP)</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>90,823</td>
<td>7.26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive Party (PPP)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>293</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Democratic Party (RDP)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United National Independence Party (UNIP)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia Democratic Congress (ZDC)</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>175,997</td>
<td>14.07</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>594</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,250,298</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>150</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Zamnet Website*
the MMD took half the seats, albeit in two cases with very low pluralities (38% in Mwinilunga East and 37% in Zambezi West). If the pattern of voting showed the greatest concentration of support for a single opposition party to be in Northwestern Province, Western Province could be characterised as having the most ‘pluralist’ outcome. Of its 17 constituencies, four were won by MMD candidates with less than 50% of the vote, while six went to opposition candidates – two to the AZ, two to ZDC and two to independents, indicating some ambivalence about the MMD but little consensus on a desired replacement. Overall, though, the MMD still ended up with a majority of the province’s seats.

In Eastern Province, probably affected more than any other part of the country by the UNIP boycott (the party won every seat there in 1991) the MMD took all 19 seats, though in six cases with less than 50% of the vote. Its victory in the province was perhaps partly by default, since UNIP’s strength in the area had, as its corollary, the weak presence of other opposition parties.

If support for MMD candidates was thus strong and widespread, at least among those voting, it is also true that the level of support for the party declined from 74.8% in 1991 to 60% in 1996. In part this was a consequence of the larger number of candidates standing, in part perhaps a sign of some alienation after five years of austerity. But the degree of decline varied considerably and in some cases may reflect the popularity of particular members of government. Roan’s MP, Vernon Mwaanga unusually enjoyed very high winning percentages in both elections – 95% in 1991 and 88% in 1996. In Nakonde, too, Edith Nawakwi’s vote was 73% in 1991 and 72% in 1996. In Serenje, AM Hamir’s winning percentage actually increased from 47% to 60%. By contrast, however, several members of the government suffered a sharp drop in support: Newstead Zimba won Kwacha with 90% of the vote in 1991 but only 53% in 1996; Chitalu Sampa in Wusakile went from 88% to 56%; Daniel Pule in Bangweulu from 86% to 47%; and Valentine Kayope in Bahati from 86% to 55%. Two Cabinet Ministers suffered decisive defeats and another five of the 19 defeated MMD candidates had served as Deputy Ministers.

Survivors in the New Cabinet

Given that most senior members of the government retained their seats, the new Cabinet was similar to its immediate predecessor. Seventeen ministers remained in the Cabinet. Three were promoted from deputy minister and one was elevated from a senior position within the party machinery. Only two were new to government. Between 1991 and 1996, there was a general departure from government of people whose political involvement stretched back before independence. Thus government experienced a slight shift towards a younger generation, although some ‘old hands’ remained. A much greater change is evident in the composition of the new Parliament. Many incumbents were re-elected, but the string of deaths and resignations over five years necessarily entailed recruitment of new MPs. Only about 36% of the 125 candidates elected to Parliament on the MMD ticket in 1991 were among those returned to office in 1996. But there were marked similarities between those elected in 1996 and those in previous contests, not least in that the overwhelming majority were male. The new Cabinet contained only one woman, Edith Nawakwi.

But there were two noteworthy features in the President’s announcement of his new government. The first was an explicit complaint that donor pressure prevented him from reappointing three members of an earlier Cabinet who had resigned after donor
pressure in December 1993 over alleged drug dealing. The comment would seem to signal both a resentment of donor intervention and a recognition of the country's dependence on them. The second was the announcement of two new posts of Deputy Minister, one for Youth and one for Religion. The latter marked a political expression of the designation of Zambia as a Christian nation in the new constitution (the Constitutional Review Commission, in contrast, had explicitly rejected this idea and asserted that Zambia should remain a secular state).

The Presidential Contest
The Presidential election produced an even more decisive victory for the MMD than did the parliamentary contest. Fewer parties fielded a candidate, a residue, in part, of the aborted attempt to consolidate opposition strength. Of these opposition candidates, only Dean Mung’omba of the ZDC secured more than 10% of the vote. Not only did Chiluba receive 73%, he also had a clear majority against the combined opposition in all but 22 constituencies; and only in 10 of these did another candidate obtain more votes than him; and only in five constituencies did a presidential candidate other than Chiluba obtain more than 50% of the presidential vote.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chakomboka, CM</td>
<td>MDP</td>
<td>41,471</td>
<td>3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiluba, FJT</td>
<td>MMD</td>
<td>913,770</td>
<td>72.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mbikusita-Lewanika, A</td>
<td>AZ</td>
<td>59,250</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mulemba, H</td>
<td>NP</td>
<td>83,875</td>
<td>6.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mung’omba, DM</td>
<td>ZDC</td>
<td>160,439</td>
<td>12.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total: 150 constituencies</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,258,805</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Zamnet Website*

On the basis of the reported results, then, the MMD was justified in claiming a clear victory – and Chiluba’s claim that the electorate had reaffirmed their approval of his government and its policies was fully justified. However, the situation is more complicated than that. Analysis must take account of the nature of the poll and of the factors leading up to (and indeed following) the election which suggest a more cautious – and perhaps rather different – conclusion.

The Poll
Perhaps the most significant feature of Zambia’s 1996 elections was that the total number voting was lower than it had been five years earlier when MMD’s victory over UNIP ushered in the Third Republic. Yet it has been calculated that the cohort of eligible voters, taking into account the age profile of the population and the mortality rate in the country, should have increased by more than 800,000 (or over a quarter) in the intervening period to 4.2 million (Endnote 4). Comparing the elections of 1991 and 1996 on the basis of the proportion of the estimated potential electorate who participated suggests a decline from in the early year 39% to 30% in 1996. On this basis, the President’s winning percentage of 73% translates to about 22% of potential voters – by any standards a shaky mandate.

This partly reflects the low poll in 1996 but also, and as importantly, the percentage of potential voters registered. It was widely acknowledged at the time that the voters
register in 1991 was inadequate. Although some updating had occurred during the last years of the Kaunda period, not all eligible voters had been included on the voters roll (with the shortfall in 1991 estimated to have been about 13%). The MMD, bitterly critical of this failure at the time, was committed to a new voter registration exercise but so delayed it that its absence resulted in postponing local elections in late 1995 and provoked concern among local democracy/human rights activists and in the donor community. The issue became a point of considerable debate, centering in part around questions of expense, efficiency and reliability. Zambia had operated since 1964 with a system involving both National Registration cards and voter registration cards, the latter being obtained on the production of the former when an individual reached 18.

The suggestion made in some quarters, and strongly advocated by the Zambia Independent Monitoring Team (ZIMT), was that a procedure based on a single card would be less costly and less subject to abuse. It was argued, moreover, that cards used routinely for identification were less likely to go astray or be lost than those brought out only periodically when elections were called. But, after initial discussions with donors about funding such a system, the government reiterated its view that two cards were needed and insisted that a single card would breed its own abuse, given that National Registration cards were issued at age 16, but voting only legally permissible at age 18.

In 1995, a contract was awarded to the Israeli firm, Nikuv, to carry out a comprehensive voter registration exercise, in circumstances arousing considerable controversy (including an application for an injunction by two opposition parties to try to stop the government awarding the contract to Nikuv). The registration period, begun in December 1995, was extended three times until 15 March 1996, to allow all who wished to come forward. Yet by the time of the election, only an estimated 2.2 (Kapata, 1996) or 2.3 million (Human Rights Watch, Africa, 1996) had been registered, considerably fewer than the 2.9 million registered at the time of 1991 elections. The 1996 poll, at about 57% of eligible voters, was higher than the 45% voting in 1991, but still low.

Some responsibility for the resulting limited nature of the 1996 mandate must be laid at the door of the government, to the extent that it was unable to ensure the registration of at least the great majority of potential voters. But neither acquisition of a voters' registration card or turning up to vote is mandatory and in many cases the shortfall must be attributed to other factors, among them an increasing disinterest in political affairs, or a conviction that individual participation via the vote counts for little. How widespread this might be – or its distribution on the basis of age, sex or residence – is difficult to gauge. Nor, of course, can conclusions be drawn as to which parties these non-participants support. It is possible, however, (even likely) that a general sense of discontent translates not into support for opposition parties but instead withdrawal from political involvement. Whatever the case, it is clear that, if the endorsement of the MMD was distinctly partial, opposition forces received even less approval.

As with previous elections the turnout in the 1996 contests varied across constituencies and regions. In the majority of cases the number voting in parliamentary contests was higher than in 1991. However, there were 65 constituencies where the vote declined from 1991: in 9 the decline was particularly marked, as indicated in Table 3.
The fact that almost all were in Eastern Province may provide evidence that the boycott called for by UNIP was at least partially observed in that part of the country where its support was greatest. This may, in turn, lend some credence to the complaint that there, in particular, the elections cannot be taken as representative the electorate’s position and views.

Elsewhere, results present a mixed picture. Northwestern Province recorded the highest proportion of constituencies with an increased turnout (see Table 4) and it had the largest increases in voting between the two elections. Thus in Solwezi West, 8,824 voted in 1996 as against 4,853 in 1991, and in Mwinilunga East, 11,588 voted as against 6,968 in 1991. The apparent enthusiasm of voters in Northwestern where there was strong support for the NP, stands in marked contrast to the pattern in Eastern Province. Table 4 also suggests an apparent decline in enthusiasm for voting in both Lusaka and Copperbelt Provinces, with a tendency for the decline to be most marked in the urban constituencies of both provinces. How these patterns should be interpreted is not clear, given that many differences in individual constituencies in totals voting in 1991 and 1996 are relatively small and that the data here is based simply on gross numbers. Nor does the direction of change take into account the level
of the poll in 1991. However, the reduced figures noted might reflect an active withdrawal of participation, even if not providing any decisive evidence of a partial boycott in response to political appeals.

Free and Fair? Post-Mortems on the Election

The elections were peaceful and the result clear. The MMD government claimed that their outcome demonstrated strong approval of its record and it showed considerable irritation with those who suggested otherwise (including cases of police harassment). Insisting that the elections had been free and fair, Vice President Miyanda cited as the basis for this judgement that there had been a free registration of voters, free access to the media for opposition parties and no violence on polling day (The Post, 21 November 1996). Members of the Christian Council of Zambia, assisted by monitors from Malawi, judged the situation calm on the basis of their observation of ten polling stations in Lusaka and agreed that the elections were free and fair (The Post, 21 November 1996).

But doubts were expressed about the fairness of the elections and the extent to which they reflected a true picture of Zambian political opinion. There was considerable disquiet among monitoring groups and, not surprisingly, among opposition parties. Complaints were made on three levels: the conduct of the election itself; the conduct of the campaign; and the legal-constitutional structures and mechanisms under which they were held. Of these, it is the third which most fundamentally contributes to the judgment (by internal and external observers) of the elections as ‘flawed’.

There were allegations of problems or improper conduct in some parts of the country. Porteous refers to anecdotal evidence of cases of MMD cadres buying and intimidating voters and exclusion of opposition agents from the vote-counting, and also notes cases where ballot boxes ‘mysteriously disappeared at key moments in the counting process’ (1997:26). Other allegations made in the immediate aftermath of the count (see, for instance, The Post, 2 December 1996) seem less credible, more apocryphal than accurate. Yet some anomalies were uncovered which served as the basis for formal legal objections – claims which were often backed by specific evidence. Thus, for example, a Human Rights Watch, Africa review of elections and human rights in Zambia’s Third Republic includes a copy of a letter indicating attempts by MMD to recruit supporters into the Police and Police Reserve forces.

Pronouncements of Election Monitoring Organisations

A number of local monitoring organisations produced formal assessments of the elections, among them: the Forum for a Democratic Process (FODEP) and the Zambia Independent Monitoring Team (ZIMT), both set up for the 1991 elections; the Committee for a Clean Campaign (CCC) set up in early 1996 as an umbrella organisation drawing on members of various NGOs and local residents throughout the country to monitor the campaigns; and two minor bodies, the Zambia Reconstruction Organisation (ZAMRO) and the Anti-Apathy Project (AVAP). There was general consensus among all of them that the elections were neither free nor fair. Among the specific allegations made were the following: the ink used to mark those who had voted was easily washed off, permitting multiple voting (ZIMT); some individuals had voted twice, once with their own card and once using a voters’ certificate (ZAMRO; ZIMT); multiple voting cards had been issued to some individuals (ZIMT, ZAMRO, AVAP); some names had been omitted from the voting register (ZAMRO); there were instances of duplication of voting card numbers
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(FODEP); and in some cases the same names appeared on the registers of different polling stations (ZAMRO) (The Post, 21 and 22 November 1996).

Assessment of Opposition Parties

The immediate response of the ZDC was to declare that the vote was rigged and the election invalid. Mong’omba stated, on behalf of his party’s central executive, that the ZDC had declared a dispute about the elections and would not recognise the MMD as having legitimately won them. Having exhausted peaceful and civilised means, he said, the party reserved the right to pursue alternative means to ‘arrest the fraudulent conduct of Mr Chiluba and the MMD’ (The Post, 20 November 1996). The position taken by other opposition parties was similar. UNIP officials were convinced that their decision to boycott the polls had been justified, in that irregularities showed that the process had been deficient on a number of counts.

There is some indication that after the elections some in the ZDC simply took the fact that they had lost so badly as evidence of electoral fraud. As one candidate reportedly complained as the counting revealed a relentless stream of MMD victories: ‘this is absolutely impossible, there is no way we can fail to get anything’ (Ibid.). But specific allegations of irregularities were also advanced by opposition officials and unsuccessful candidates, including the following: individuals voting twice at separate polling stations; ballot boxes being removed from polling stations instead of being counted there under the scrutiny of party representatives; more people voting at one polling station than were registered there; presiding officers turning party agents away; and multiple voting cards being issued to individuals (The Post, 20 and 21 November 1996).

Conduct of the Campaign

Alfred Zulu, president of ZIMT, focused on the boycott by UNIP and the fact that many voter registration cards were not collected as the basis for his conclusion that the elections had not permitted adequate participation, arguing that this of itself called the outcome into question. He concluded that the overwhelming dominance of a single party was a ‘threat to democracy’ (The Post, 20 November 1996).

Other criticisms of the conduct of the campaign related to allegations of voters being bribed and the improper use of government resources, especially the state media. It was the view of the chair of the CCC, Mwanajita, that the state-owned media had been partial, prejudicing the campaign and the elections (The Post, 21 November 1996). The acting head of FODEP agreed, citing the results of a count of stories carried by ZNBC television, the Zambia Daily Mail and the Times of Zambia which revealed almost twice as many featuring the MMD as all opposition parties combined (The Post, 22 November 1996). Widespread vote-buying was alleged by both CCC and ZAMRO, the former accusing both the MMD and ZDC of having influenced the vote through the distribution of cash and materials (The Post, 21 November 1996).

The Institutional and Legal Context of the Elections

While critical of the conduct of the election and the campaign, several opposition parties insisted that the institutional framework in which the elections were held was the basis of their rejection of the results. In early December 1996, Kaunda and Chongwe announced the initiation of a three month campaign of civil disobedience (The Post, 4 December 1996). Two petitions were lodged in the courts by opposition
groups. One, submitted by UNIP's general secretary and a representative of the LPF, challenged President Chiluba's citizenship qualifications and hence his right to contest the election. The second, sponsored by the leaders of AZ, ZDC and the National Congress concentrated on the electoral process itself, specifically the activities of the Electoral Commission and the conduct of voter registration.

These general complaints echoed the reservations of local monitoring groups. Both FODEP and the CCC repeatedly stressed that the primary reason the elections could not be judged free and fair was the flawed nature of the context in which they occurred: deficiencies and irregularities in voter registration; the constitutional provisions limiting participation; and the inadequacies of the Electoral Commission. It was to these factors that donor representatives also drew attention after the election. A spokesman for the US Embassy, for example, expressed regret that certain candidates, particularly Kaunda, had been unable to contest the elections, although he also regretted UNIP's boycott. The EU expressed regret that the elections had not been held on a basis acceptable to all parties (The Post, 22 November 1996) and the Japanese Embassy noted that the elections had not accommodated all political competitors (The Post, 6 December 1996). Declining to say whether the elections were free and fair, given that his embassy had not directly monitored them, the Japanese representative indicated that his government would be unable to extend balance of payments support to Zambia if the current political crisis were not resolved.

This immediate post-election stance of the donors is consistent with comments made throughout much of the previous year, indicating a growing consensus that multipartyism and the holding of elections are not sufficient criteria of democratic progress (or even evidence of democratic status) but that what is needed is the development of an institutional context which preserves and promotes equitable political participation. There has never been consensus among the donors in Zambia about what political system they prefer, let alone what pressure might legitimately be brought to encourage its development. A reading of political conditions applied at regular Consultative Group meetings does not immediately suggest the delineation of an agreed set of benchmarks describing a process of democratic consolidation, building logically from one stage to the next.

Even so, the emphases outlined and reiterated over the year do represent a growing consensus about what is not deemed acceptable, namely: a constitution which incorporates discriminatory elements impeding equitable opportunities for participation; a machinery which does not permit the translation of formal right to vote into practice; the lack of a free press and guarantees for freedom of expression; the lack of a clear separation of the regulators of the electoral process from the government; and the persistence of undue advantage to the party in control of government. Alongside a recurrent theme about the need to curb corruption, it was broadly these issues which were highlighted in the CG meeting in December 1995 held in Bournemouth. As summarised by the chair of the meeting, Katherine Marshall, director of the Southern African department of the World Bank, concerns articulated by the donors included,

> the need to build strong institutions, laws, systems and processes that will support civil society rather than threaten it, with a particular imperative on an open constitutional review based on widespread popular consensus; the need to pursue civil service reform that will ensure the efficient provision of public services and guarantee full accountability of all public servants; and the need to root out and prosecute corruption.

She described as striking the way in which donor comments at the meeting connected the importance of governance issues to commitments to maintain levels of aid. In
practice the impatience of the donors over lack of progress on governance/democracy largely underpinned their reluctance at reconvened meetings of the CG to agree specific aid commitments. Judging little movement to have occurred in regard to their stated concerns by the end of March 1996, first Norway and then the UK suspended balance of payments support for Zambia, in the latter case to the tune of some £10 million. Both explicitly linked their moves to governance matters and, more specifically, to the constitution and the manner in which it was officially approved. Subsequently Denmark withheld debt relief totalling 40 million Danish krona and a portion of German aid was frozen. In July 1996 the US announced a 10% cut in aid, amounting to $2.5 million, in consequence of its view that amendments in the new Zambian constitution constituted a reversal of the democratic process (although ironically—and perhaps tellingly—its cuts were largely on those initiatives intended to assist in the process of political reform and democratisation). Among other donors, the Netherlands, France, and Sweden all indicated that they were watching events and reviewing their aid arrangements in view of governance issues (The Post, 6 June; 26 June; 17 June 1996; Human Rights Watch, Africa).

The Zambian government remained adamant that it was not breaching democratic principles, thereby suggesting that much of the dispute centred around contradictory views as to the very criteria for defining democracy and democratic consolidation. The Finance Minister, Ronald Penza, is reported, for example, to have told a reconvened CG meeting in Bournemouth that his government's reworking and enactment of the constitution was not a governance issue and, indeed, that only a breach of human rights would constitute a governance issue (The Post, 21 June 1996). This line of argument has a parallel in complaints by various ministers about donor intrusion into matters affecting Zambian sovereignty and comments that Zambia will 'go it alone' if necessary.

After the Elections

There is no doubt that the conduct and context of the 1996 elections have soured considerably what was once an amicable partnership between the MMD and the donors. The active players in the drama are increasingly polarised, with the government, bolstered by its electoral victory, on one side, and the donors, opposition parties and some vocal elements of civil society, on the other. The criticisms voiced in the days after the results were announced were met by government denunciations and some harassment of critics. Various opposition party members and heads of monitoring organisations were picked up by police for questioning and the accounts of the CCC were scrutinised. A prominent ZNBC figure was sacked on the basis that his involvement with the CCC compromised his neutrality. Much publicity was given to a former ZIMT official who alleged active involvement of named members of the donor community in election monitoring groups, thus suggesting collusion and external interference. The government moved to produce legislation which would more tightly regulate the activities and finances of local NGOs.

It is probable that the critical stance of the donors served to encourage opposition elements and activists in local civic organisations in their protests (activists in many African countries have stated in numerous interviews that they consider international pressure to be their main shield against government suppression). The relationship between these streams of criticism is intricate and not unambiguous, however. The donors do not provide overt material support to political parties and are careful to be formally neutral in their dealings with those of all political persuasions. But in the build-up to the election they did tend to put particular focus on the situation of UNIP
and thereby perhaps to appear particularly concerned about its fortunes. If this was so, however, it was because UNIP had been singled out by the arrest and detention of 8 of its key executive members on charges of treason and murder (who were freed after four months, shortly before the elections) and because UNIP was most directly affected by the new constitutional provisions barring any individual from serving as president for more than two terms and stipulating that a candidate’s parents must have been citizens by birth or descent (the so-called ‘Kaunda clause’).

The similarity of the criticisms levelled by donors and some opposition parties could be (and was) taken as evidence of partiality. But allegations of collusion were more typical with regard to local NGOs concerned with monitoring, civic education and human rights, not least because some of these were funded by and indeed dependent on donor assistance. Hence in the aftermath of the election, publicity was given to allegations of links between donors and NGOs. But while the latter may have received support from donors, in some cases flowing directly out of donor programmes to support political reform and promote democratisation, it would be inaccurate to assume that they were stooges of the donors. Their own stance on the issue [as reiterated in several interviews with the authors] is typically to take advantage of external support to put forward a case in which they strongly believe and to be wary of too close an attachment to any given source of funding.

Conclusion

The 1996 elections should have been a triumph for the MMD government. A huge electoral victory after five years of economic restructuring and austerity should have been a sign of the legitimacy of the democratization process and a renewal of the government’s mandate. Instead, the government finds itself having presided over an election about which many aspects are disputed and criticised. It is accused of reversing the democratic direction set out in its founding programme, of constitutional and electoral manipulation, of presiding over an inadequate voter registration process and of unfairness in the conduct of the actual elections. It is at loggerheads with the human rights activists in Zambia who were such passionate supporters of its initial democratic aims. Its relations with the donor community, which so strongly regarded it as the showpiece of democratic development in Africa and which so enthusiastically supported it with aid, have become strained; and there is a danger that these difficulties will affect its restructuring and liberalisation programmes. The government, for its part, is clearly hurt and angered by all this criticism. It feels that it has not breached its basic democratic principles and that the criticism is either misguided or malicious in its intent.

The donors, too, are in a difficult position, given that any long-term withdrawal of support would damage the fragile economy and impose serious hardship on the population. In determining an appropriate course of action they must consider whether any deficiency discerned in the electoral process is serious enough to justify drastic action, particularly given the MMD’s large margin of victory. Consideration must also be given to whether Zambia’s democracy-governance performance is worse than that of other African governments where aid has not been reduced. And yet, if no action is taken and donor aid reinstated, broader questions must be raised about the implications for political conditionality and the linkage between aid on the one hand and democracy, governance and human rights reform on the other.

And what of the Zambian opposition, divided partly on regional lines, partly by personal ambitions? Even accepting that the government hardly played fair, rushing
through discriminatory provisions in the constitution, delaying the announcement of a date for the election, using police powers to disrupt opposition activity (particularly in the case of UNIP), it must also be said that, by entering the elections, elements of the opposition gave them a degree of legitimacy which was difficult to retract subsequently. It would appear that the opposition exhibited poor judgement about tactics and about the political mood. In the vast majority of constituencies, and in the country overall, the opposition – individually or in combination – was simply not strong enough to match the MMD. Its victory was indisputable.

An indisputable win on the basis of the voting figures, perhaps, but the MMD’s has not been an undisputed or uncontested victory. The government might regard the mass of the population as being on its side and the opposition parties and local election monitoring NGOs as taking advantage of donor disquiet to make an unwarranted fuss, refusing to play by the rules and accept a legitimate result. A counter-claim, however, is that the rules do not constitute an acceptable democratic framework. The MMD has won a second election under the multi-party system, but has not been able to convince key sectors of the international community and substantial sections of its own intelligentsia that its victory is legitimate. The problem is precisely with perceived deficiencies in institutional development which, in the judgement of some, prevent full and equal participation of all members of the electorate or potential contestants of electoral proceedings. Human Rights Africa/Watch’s recent review of the situation constitutes a detailed account of such perceived deficiencies, paralleling the position taken by many critics. Yet at the heart of controversy aroused by the elections is a lack of consensus over rules and norms governing what is and what is not democratization. Taking each party at its word, rather than as using words to mask other intentions and agendas, it must be acknowledged that notions of democracy and criteria for measurement of democratic consolidation remain matters of contention.

It is not clear whether the post-election situation Zambia is best described as an impasse, a crisis, or just an unpleasant interlude prior to a return to donor acquiesence in the status quo (albeit with less enthusiastic support than before) while opposition politicians lick their wounds and consider the relative cost and effectiveness of future initiatives. But at the least it can be suggested that Zambia’s second elections held during the Third Republic posed more questions about democratic claims than validated progress toward democratic consolidation.

Carolyn Baylies and Morris Szeftel are at the University of Leeds, UK.

Endnotes

1. The writers would like to acknowledge the generous support of a number of bodies. Our research into the relationship between aid and democratization, in preparation as Aid and Democratization in Zambia, was part of a larger project on Aid, ‘Political Conditionality’ and the Role of External Agencies in the Democratization Process undertaken by members of the Centre for Democratization Studies in the University of Leeds, which was funded by the ESRC, (R000234986). We are presently beginning an evaluation of the 1996 elections and their implications for the broader process of democratisation in Zambia, funded by ODA. Neither the ODA nor the ESRC, however, has any responsibility for any information provided or views expressed.

3. Analysis of the election results uses data from the Zambia Elections Office for parliamentary and presidential contests in 1991 and for subsequent by-elections and from the website Zambia General Elections 1996 on Zamnet [http://www.zamnet.zm]. Tables 1 and 2 are reproduced from the Zamnet website; Tables 3 and 4 are calculated from the same source.

4. There is much controversy about the size of the potential electoral cohort and about how complete the registration exercise was. The figure of 4.2 million cited here is conservatively based on calculations carried out by a representative of the donor community. It draws on the 1990 census and incorporates probable mortality over the intervening period. The figure most commonly stated in the international press and indeed by some of the local election monitoring organisations is variously 4.5 or 4.6 million. This has, in turn, been disputed by the head of the MMD's election campaign, Vernon Mwaangwa, who countered with a figure of 2.7 to 2.8 million as the number of eligible voters in 1996. If this last figure is correct, the potential electorate is smaller than in 1991, and even than the total number registered in that year, implying that mortality rates have risen to a far greater extent than has been assumed.

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Debates

On the Idea of an International Bantustan
Roy Love

In the Debate raised by Martin Doornbos in ROAPE 69 on the classification of Uganda as an ‘international Bantustan’ by David Himbara and Dawood Sultan (No 63), I would claim that they are all wrong. Martin Doornbos provides a useful corrective to the unduly pessimistic presentation of the current state of the Ugandan economy and polity that is given by Himbara and Sultan, and is also correct in reminding us of the extensive degree of control exercised by external powers in many other African countries, but he is too quick to dismiss the use of the expression ‘Bantustan’ in an oversimplified few lines. Likewise, Himbara and Sultan base their analogy on only a few, mainly fiscal, characteristics of the South African Bantustans.

Little is to be gained by debating details of how and in what ways budgetary dependence exists in African nation states. Dependence can obviously take many forms in many different circumstances. Even the number of expatriates tells us little. Smaller nations, such as Botswana, have long had Western expatriates in important civil service positions, but it should not be assume that localisation of administrative structures will necessarily make a great deal of difference to policy making. It is not so much the numbers of graduates from Makerere that is important as the ideological content of the syllabi which they bring with them, to be reinforced by post-graduate study in the United States and elsewhere. The agenda in this respect has long been set by the West.

The comparison with Bantustans is more problematic than any of the three writers recognise and it is worth recalling how they originated. Their precursors were the ‘native reserves’ and ‘locations’ of the pre-apartheid period in South Africa, reflecting a continuing history of land dispossession, dislocation and forced removal over a period of 300 years. They were essential to the creation of labour reserves and the circular flow of migrant labour to serve white farms, mines, other businesses and households in South Africa. Economically neglected and underdeveloped, they were crucial to the process of proletarianising African labour in the region. In this they underpinned the rise of a form of capitalism dominated by a self-defined white racial group. One factor relevant to the present debate is the limited degree to which this racist social structure has altered with the collapse of the apartheid state. One might argue, in fact, that the ‘apartheid state’ continues in so far as its principal beneficiaries continue to dominate economic power, which is all that counts. For the large numbers of people living in townships, squatter camps, and former ‘homelands’ choices have changed little. The parallels with post-colonial independence elsewhere in Africa are, in this sense, clear.

The creation of the Bantustans therefore reinforced communities of dependence amongst major cultural groups, which, in recognising their difference, provided legitimacy for their exploitation. The Bantustans were, as Doornbos points out, clearly racist in conception and implementation, but this does not, as I have indicated in the preceding paragraph, eliminate them as useful reference points in other contexts. More specifically, this may be done at two levels: one historical and the other contemporary.
At the historical level Mamdani has recently raised interesting doubts over the 'exceptionality' of South Africa, drawing comparisons with colonial control in Uganda and using the concept of a bifurcated state (Mamdani, 1996). In this view it is not perhaps so much that Uganda is itself an international 'Bantustan' but that regions within the country and the history of their relationships with the centre have not been so different from that of the 'locations' of South Africa. An interesting extension of this line of thought is found in the parallels between 'racism' and 'tribalism' as social and political constructs in colonial and post-colonial discourse.

Second, there is a major way in which African countries, not only Uganda, may be regarded as replicating the 'Bantustan' experience in an international rather than domestic arena, and not simply in an economic reductionist fashion vis-à-vis western capitalist economies. There is, firstly, the colonial determination of national boundaries and hence the restrictive control of labour movement, not least to Europe itself. This is particularly evident in North Africa with labour migration across the Mediterranean and the rise of 'fortress Europe' and its ever restrictive policies regarding immigration and asylum seeking, but it also applies to a number of sub-Saharan countries such as Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire and Zaire.

The use of these boundaries to define nation states which are in direct line from their colonial precursors has also facilitated continuity of influence and control, through membership of bodies such as the Commonwealth and the Lome Convention, through unbroken trading channels, and by both overt and clandestine support for favoured rulers. They also separate and divide linguistic and culturally similar communities, often with better communications to the former colonial powers than between themselves. Sustained incorporation into the global economy is therefore premised on clearly defined, but compliant, nation states in Africa.

The use of the term 'Bantu' itself is more problematic. It may at first sight appear to be totally irrelevant, as Doornbos indicates, but because of the way in which it completely homogenised a wide variety of cultural groups in South Africa in terms defined by the colonisers, its use by Himbara and Sultan may result in it being transferred to define 'Africans' in the same way. The term received extensive discussion in the Tomlinson Report of 1954 in South Africa, as part of the process of legitimising the establishment of the Bantu homelands. Although the Report itself recognised the diversity of 'Bantu' cultures, as ground for 'separate development', in wider usage the expression simply displaced the earlier 'native' (Ashforth, 1990). The latter, indeed, had connotations of a primal presence on the land which the colonisers became anxious to remove. For white South Africans 'the Bantu' thus became synonymous with 'the blacks' as an all embracing racist category.

Himbara and Sultan's use of the expression Bantustan is therefore dangerous not because it may be institutionally inapt in the case of Uganda but, more importantly, because it will so readily be seen to be 'apt' to a variety of countries and situations elsewhere in Africa. The Western media already has a 'Bantustanised' perception of all of sub-Saharan Africa - it is not only where black people live but it is where they should live. The popular image in the West, moreover, is one of an Africa teetering from disaster to disaster in an almost permanent state of universal drought and internecine war but in which the response is similar to that of the former apartheid government to the 'homelands' of South Africa. The problems are seen to be those of their own making - corruption, tribalism, incompetence and overpopulation. The West, as with the apartheid government, absolves
itself from responsibility – at least as far as causes are concerned – by associating spatial distancing with logical disconnection.

While Martin Doornbos is therefore right to remind us of the racist origins of the term ‘Bantustan’ in the particular social structure of South Africa, the degree to which Western policy and attitudes towards Africa is also inspired by racism is infrequently recognised, or if so, understood. This has recently been drawn to our attention by Mark Duffield in defining contemporary developmentalism as ‘the Eurocentric projection of multiculturalist theory and practice on to the external crisis’ (Duffield, 1996) where that multiculturalism is racism in the guise of ‘difference’. The parallels with the theory of ‘separate development’ which came to legitimise the Bantustans are clear. The Bantustans were concerned with containment of the ‘native problem’. Likewise the main international concern with Africa today is one of containment, this time of economic and political instability which would distract the global superpowers from their principal objective of extending and consolidating their influence, albeit in competition with one another, in the Far East, Europe and North America. In so far as African countries have any role to play it is as costless bit-players.

The introduction of the notion of ‘international Bantustans’ is therefore useful in one sense, not because it simply highlights a particular form of dependency but also because it draws attention to a wider form of corporatist racism in international relations. On the other hand, by using such an expression we also legitimise the transfer of a terminology which encourages a view of Africa and Africans that, with its roots in white South Africa, is inaccurate, misleading, overgeneralised and, at heart, a colonial construct.

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Peacekeeping and an ‘African High Command’:

*Plus Ca Change, C’ Est La Meme Chose*

Alfred Zack-Williams

In September 1996, in the midst of both the US Presidential elections and the Zairean-Rwanda crisis, it was announced that President Clinton had approved what *The Guardian* called an ‘African “Crisis Army”’ (*The Guardian*, 30 September 1996). Clinton’s all-African army would be 10,000 strong, trained and equipped by the United States and her West European allies, with the former accounting for 50% of the cost of the force, and the Western allies the rest. According to *The Guardian*, the African Crisis Response Force (ACRF) would be dispatched to ‘countries where insurrection, civil war or campaigns of genocide threaten mass civilian casualties’ (Ibid, p.10).
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_Plus Ca Change, C’ Est La Meme Chose_

Alfred Zack-Williams

In September 1996, in the midst of both the US Presidential elections and the Zairean-Rwanda crisis, it was announced that President Clinton had approved what _The Guardian_ called an ‘African “Crisis Army”’ (The Guardian, 30 September 1996). Clinton’s all-African army would be 10,000 strong, trained and equipped by the United States and her West European allies, with the former accounting for 50% of the cost of the force, and the Western allies the rest. According to _The Guardian_, the African Crisis Response Force (ACRF) would be dispatched to ‘countries where insurrection, civil war or campaigns of genocide threaten mass civilian casualties’ (Ibid, p.10).
In what follows, I want to argue that discourses on an African High Command is as old as African independence, and that whilst the actors may have changed, the events and place largely remain the same. In this respect, Congo, or Zaire, as this former Belgium colony is now called, has remained a pivotal point in this discourse. In pointing to the imperative for a peacekeeping force, I want to draw attention to some of the problems in the way of such a continental force, in particular the question of institutional capacity deficiency.

This Briefing would also look at attempts by African states to address the issues of inter-state and intra-state conflicts, in particular, the Organisation of African Unity’s Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (MCPMR). The assumption is that external intervention runs the risk of alienating combatants and the local population. As Cleaver and May have put it, the ‘Africanisation of peacekeeping forces avoids the all too popular impression ‘that black African lives were of less value than white European ones’ (Cleaver & May, 1995:485). Inherent in any such intervention is the risk of conflating three processes: humanitarian relief effort; contesting battlefield delivery power (Hawley, 1996); and the task of nation building or, promoting American values (Mandelbaum, 1996). With regards to this last point, Madeline Albright, the former US, UN representative has asserted that the Bush administration dispatched troops to Somalia, ‘for the restoration of an entire country’ (Lewis, 1993:3). This bipolar policy of bolstering conservative and corrupt regimes such as Mobutu’s Zaire on the one hand, and saving lives on the other has been the hallmark of peacekeeping regimes in the post-cold war era in Africa.

### Union Government & an African High Command

The call for an African High Command is not new. In September 1960, in a speech to the United Nations General Assembly, President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana urged the UN to send troops to the Congo, to support the legitimate Government of Premier Patrice Lumumba, and to suppress all private armies, including that of secessionist Katanga, led by Moise Tshombe (Howell and Rajasooria, 1972).

In January 1961, at the Casablanca meeting of five African heads of state (Nasser (Egypt), Toure’ (Guinea Conakry), King Mohammed V (Morocco), Modibo Keita (Mali) and Ferhat Abbas (Algieria)), at the instigation of Kwame Nkrumah, the meeting produced an agreement to create a joint African High Command to carry out the aims of an anti-colonialist Casablanca Charter. In declaring non-alignement, the Charter proclaimed the determination of signatories: ‘to liberate the African territories still under foreign domination’, and to ‘liquidate colonialism and neo-colonialism throughout the continent’ (Howell & Rajasooria, 1972:68).

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) command structure provided the inspiration for this radical group of African nationalists, as they called for a NATO-type organisational structure, with an African Consultative Assembly and Joint Command to implement the Casablanca Charter. The aim of these nationalists was ‘to keep the cold war out of Africa’ (Ibid.); in order to achieve this they demanded that all non-African personnel serving in the Congolese army should be expelled, and a reorganisation of the UN Congo Command ‘so that the initiative in producing a solution comes primarily from the African states’ (Ibid.). This retort by the leaders of the radical African states reads just like Mandela’s response to the ACRF. Whilst cautiously welcoming the idea of a ‘crisis army’ Mandela felt that it would have been
better had the idea originated from within Africa.

Among radical pan-Africanist leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Modibo Keita of Mali and Ahmed Sheku Turay of Guinea Conakry, the focus of their foreign policy was the establishment of an 'All African Union Government' and an 'African high command' was a central ingredient to this policy (Nkrumah, 1973; Hadjor, 1988; Rooney 1988). This question of a high command dominated the Casablanca Conference of 3 to 7 January 1961 summoned to discuss the Congo crisis, the war in Algeria, and apartheid in South Africa and whose members included Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Libya and the Algerian FLN. It was agreed to set up a joint African high command. The Charter of the conservative group, the Afro-Malagasy Union (UAM), consisting mainly of Francophone African countries also called for a higher defence council. Following the army mutiny in Tanzania which was put down by British military intervention, African leaders soon returned to the idea of an 'African force', or what the weekly journal *West Africa* called an 'African fire brigade' (*West Africa*, 15 February, 1964). It was also reported that both the British and the Canadians would pay for the training of such a force.

The theme of a continental military force dominated the next two Africa Heads of State conferences in Cairo in July 1964 and Accra in September 1965. At the Cairo conference, Kwame Nkrumah, the doyen of continental unity and high command was criticized by Julius Nyerere for 'preaching' but not 'practicing' unity in reference to alleged subversion from Ghana against neighbouring African countries (*West Africa*, 25 July, 1964).

The concerns which impelled the call for an African high command by these nationalists differed from those which now seem to concern 'the international community' and the current African leaders.

The early nationalist concerns were based on the desire to safeguard newly won independence from alleged agents of external aggression and subversion as well as the desire to rid the continent of the last vestiges of colonialism and imperialism (represented by the white minority regimes). Nkrumah in particular called for a union government (his famous maxim of seeking first the political kingdom), in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency. He argued that 'only a union government could make Africa strong enough to deal with the wider forces of neo-colonialism and the white racist regimes of Rhodesia and South Africa'. (Rooney, 1988). Pan-Africanists like Nkrumah and Turay, argued that colonialism left weak, Balkanised, and non-viable states, and that only through continental unity could Africa be in a position to demand a better deal from the capitalist industrial world for its raw materials. Central to this view was the idea that the high command would be the watch dog against foreign subversion. By contrast, 'the adjusting African state' of the post-1980 era is dwarfed by 'contestations from inside' (Gutto, 1996).

The irony is that despite the civil wars in the (then) Congo and Rwanda, which caused *West Africa* (15 February 1964) to describe President Kayibanda of Rwanda as 'the Nero of Africa' after the horrific slaughter of thousands of civilians; the radical pan-Africanists continue to see the problems of instability as one of external instigation. In the case of Nkrumah, this obsession must be related to the fact that he survived several assassination attempts, for which the US Central Intelligence Agency was blamed. Thus the government-controlled *Ghanaian Times* described 'US imperialism as the worst enemy of the Ghanaian people and the chief organiser of murderers against democratic leaders of people' (*West Africa*, 1964). The Ghanaian Evening News also continued the theme of 'anti-imperialism' by informing readers that: 'Wherever Pan-Africanists meet they were
discussing American complicity in the gruesome catalogue of murderous African patriots' (Ibid.).

The overthrow of Nkrumah in February 1966, by a group of military officers as he was on his way to Vietnam, not only confirmed the concern about 'imperialist dirty tricks', but also put an end to any serious discussion of an African high command. Meanwhile, as we have seen, the continent continued to be riddled with violent crises. In cases such as the Algerian/Moroccan border dispute, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) was able to mediate successfully between the warring nations. In many other disputes we saw increasing external intervention: such as the involvement of South Africa in the Angolan and Mozambican civil wars and the intervention of Cuban forces in the former; the removal of Idi Amin from office by the Tanzania armed forces; the intervention of Libyan forces in the Chadian civil war; and the scuttling of the hopes of the people of Western Sahara by Morocco and Mauritania; and the conflict in Somalia which rendered that country 'stateless'.

Conflicts & Conflict Resolution in the Post-cold War Era

The end of the cold war also saw the end of apartheid in South Africa and the emergence of new forms of social conflicts on the continent and new realism. The cold war provided African leaders with a limited 'political clout', as a number of them tried to play off one super-power against the other. But the emergence of a world marked by the military-technological superiority of the US; the end of 'Fordist' production methods in the developed capitalist world; the rise of 'developmentalist centres' within the third world; all these forces led to the growing marginalisation of Africa both as a source of raw materials for the developed centre, and as a market for manufactured goods. Africa, perhaps with the exception of the Republic of South Africa, it is argued by 'Afro-pessimists', is of declining significance to the world capitalist economy. In the US, the Republican dominated Congress seeks to 'zero out Africa' from US foreign aid as 'the United States has only minimal national interests in Africa' (Cohen, 1995:14).

The problems of no-growth and continued poverty triggered off new forms of conflicts in Africa: a move away from the challenge to the state from either external aggressors or, from the praetorian guard, through the mechanism of the coup d'états; to contesting hegemonic project. These conflicts are largely the results of internal contradictions within African states (Gutto, 1996) including attempts by factions of the governing class to create new state formations. Given the OAU edict about the sanctity of pre-independence boundaries (Ibid.), those who sought to challenge the territorial integrity of the 'nation state', soon ran into strong continental opposition. However, the triumph of Eritrea, and the ending of 'the sanctification of national borders' rule called for a continental peacekeeping mechanism if the 'curse of nation state' is not to be transformed into continental self-destruction. With this in mind African governments have experimented with various forms of conflict management. Countries such as Guinea, Conakry and Sierra Leone have entered into mutual pact designed to defend each other in the case of 'aggressive'. This pact was used to invite Guinean troops to 'maintain law and order' in Sierra Leone during the era of Siaka Stevens. Also, members of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) are moving towards a 'common security regime' along the line of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (da Costa, 1995).

In 1981, the OAU dispatched a peacekeeping force to Chad, the experience of this force points to some of the institutional problems of peacekeeping in Africa (Cleaver & May, 1995). The force was withdrawn after a year. Among the diffi-
culties this Inter-African Force (IAF) encountered are: First, that of command and control, as each national unit continued to work to 'an individual agenda'. Cleaver & May noted:

The Zaireans, for example, ignored the instruction of the Nigerian IAF commander. They received logistical support from the US and appeared to act as a US proxy force (Ibid, p. 491).

Second, the mandate of the IAF seemed unclear to both warring parties: the Government of Goukouni Waddeye saw the function of the IAF as 'regime supporting', that is, replacing his departing allies, the Libyans. This position was rejected by the OAU who feared repeating some of the mistakes of peacekeeping in the Congo in the early 1960s, by emphasising its neutral role in supervising 'the formation of a Chadian National Army from the forces of the various factions' (Ibid, p. 491). For Habre, the raison d'être of the IAF was 'regime opposing', to ensure the exit of the 'invading Libyan forces'. A third factor was the size of the units that came to form the IAF.

As Cleaver and May put it: 'the force was inadequate in size, insufficiently financed and blighted by confusion over the mandate' (Ibid). Fourth, the colonial heritage and regional interests tend to produce conflicting agendas between Anglophone and Francophone Africa. This was more apparent in the composition of the Economic Community of West African States 11,000-strong peacekeeping force (ECOMOG) which was set up in 1990 to bring peace to war-torn Liberia. The force was 'viewed as a primarily Anglophone force dominated by Nigeria and acting mainly in the latter's interests.' Apart from Guinea, and initially Senegal, ECOMOG received no support from Francophone Africa whilst troops from Uganda and Tanzania have joined ECOMOG (Cleaver & May, 1996). Thus the absence of political will to carry intervention to its conclusion; the absence of a viable political and military command structure; efficient administrative structure and adequate financial resources have dogged ECOMOG. As Cleaver and May noted, what Africa has in abundance is experience in peacekeeping both inside and outside the continent.

Somalia and the Contradiction of International Peacekeeping

In 1992 Somalia continued to sink into a 'stateless' abyss (Menkhaus & Prendergast, 1995) posing a major headache 1995 not only for African leaders but for the international community as well. This conflict was too complex for any institutional peacekeeping force that the OAU could mobilise, and as such, it was left to the US to mount a humanitarian peacekeeping force to save the suffering civilians. The decision by the US government to send troops to impose peace upon the warring factions and the subsequent death of 18 US Army Rangers in October 1993 had a far-reaching effect on America's willingness to intervene in future armed humanitarian projects; it also marked a retreat from 'the rhetoric of assertive multilateralism' (Clarke & Herbst, 1996:71).

This retreat from 'humanitarian intervention' produced by the Somalia experience also affected the United Nations. UN pessimism was expressed by Secretary-General Boutros Boutrous Ghali in An Agenda for Peace, 1995, the policy document on UN peacekeeping. Peacekeeping in Somalia saw the conflation of humanitarian intervention and the provision of basic needs on the one hand, and that of the more complex task of nation building and 'recasting the institutions of the state'. According to Clarke and Herbst, American intervention in Somalia disrupted the political economy and soon became enmeshed in 'the muck of Somali politics', changing its direction by enhancing the roles and status of the warlords.
What was surprising about US intervention in Somalia is that it took place at all. Liberia, a major sphere of US influence, had been involved since 1989 in internecine warfare which cost thousands of lives and displaced hundreds of thousands of Liberians. Yet, the US continued to show a conspicuous lack of interest, notwithstanding the fact that one of the main warlords, Charles Taylor was a fugitive from a US prison. Perhaps this is an indication of the marginalised position of Liberia in terms of US global policy as compared to Grenada, Panama, Libya and Iraq. Somalia, though not a 'pivotal state' in terms of US foreign policy, still occupies a close proximity to the Persian Gulf and revolutionary Eritrea. Meanwhile, in other failed states, such as Sierra Leone where civil strife had destroyed the legitimacy of the state, there emerged a 'surrogate international oppressive state apparatus' in the form of Executive Outcomes (EO). According to Jeremy Harding, this is a 'new incarnation of hire army' (Harding, 1996:1). Executive Outcomes, a company which is South African based, was founded at the sunset of apartheid in 1989. It consists of a core of white South African officers, and has been involved in fighting against rebel groups in the west and south of the continent.

The importance of EO for our theme on peacekeeping is (as Harding has pointed out): that it (EO) "thrives on the absence of civility, consensus, law and order", and its main operations have been in countries such as Angola and Sierra Leone with valuable mineral resources. The defeat of rebel Foday Sankoh's ragged army and the protection of the mining fields were the two major achievement's of EO. The new reality in Africa is different from the old: EO is more hierarchical than the mercenaries of old who brought misery to much of Africa in the period of the cold war; EO is part of a complicated, 'privatised' network of companies.

The MCPMR, Continental Response to Peacekeeping & Conflict Prevention

The question of conflict resolution was given high priority in the OAU Charter as shown by the setting up the Commission of Mediation, Conciliation and Arbitration (CMCA) under Article VII and XIX of its Charter (Gutto, 1996). Yet, the CMCA did not provide the basis for a viable mechanism for conflict prevention or resolution. However, the recognition of the destructive effects of intra-state conflicts impelled OAU members to seek a more viable mechanism. At their annual meeting in Cairo in June 1993, African leaders set up the Central Mechanism for the Prevention and Management of Conflict, as the main structure for preventive diplomacy on the continent (da Costa, 1995). This represents an 'ambiguous structure that seeks to break Africa's dependence on outside mediators' (Ibid, p. 27). The meeting also set up a Peace Fund by committing 5% of its annual budget of $30 million to the fund, but the OAU still remained opposed to a high command because of its 'principle of non-intervention in the affairs of member states' (Ibid).

According to Gutto, the MCPMR is a sequel to the CMCA, a new way of African collective thinking designed to deal with 'the scourge of conflicts within and between our (African) countries'. Whilst acknowledging the limitation of African institutional capacity, the MCPMR is not expected to deal with the mega-conflicts which afflict the continent. For this reason, OAU members are urged to continue to support UN peacekeeping efforts. MCPMR's primary objective is the anticipation and prevention of conflicts. However, in situations of conflict, the immediate task the organisation is to institute peacekeeping and peace building mechanism, in order to ensure speedy resolution of conflicts. The strategy is to coordinate activities at regional and sub-regional levels, including the enlisting of
organisations such as ECOMOG already involved in peacekeeping.

Administratively, MCPMR is situated in Addis Ababa, and its main activities are coordinated by the Central Organ (CO) set up by its charter. The CO is composed of elected members of the Bureau of the Assembly of Head of State and Government, and the Secretary-General of the OAU is the Chief Executive of the CO. He or she is empowered, after consultation with the parties to a dispute, to take all necessary measures to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts (Gutto). By late 1995, the CO had convened about a dozen sessions at ministerial level, and had dealt with inter-state and intra-state conflicts such as Nigeria and Cameroun over the disputed Bakassi peninsula and the Rwanda, Somalia, Liberia, Burundi Angola and Mozambique conflicts.

Conclusion

In this Briefing, I have drawn attention to the imperative for a continental mechanism for dealing with intra-state and inter-state conflicts that seem to threaten most states in Africa. I have argued that both radical and conservative states have called for a ‘high command’ in order to resolve conflicts. However, for various reasons such as lack of institutional capacity, lack of political will, logistical problems, problems of command and control, scarcity of financial resources and logistical support, a high command is not a realistic option. Despite this failure to provide a continental peacekeeping force, African countries have wealth of experience in peacekeeping both within and outside of the continent (Cleaver & May, 1995). It seems that until these political and military problems are addressed, peacekeeping will have to assume a regional dimension, or it will have to reflect the continent’s dependence on outside powers to keep its continental house in order.

A Zack-Williams, University of Central Lancashire.

Bibliography


France's African Aid Policy: The End of an Era?

Bernard Conte

Unlike the other OECD countries, France has increased its overseas development aid in recent years. This is explained by the importance it accords its overseas commitments, particularly in Africa, which has remained a priority arena for French foreign policy. Most French aid is bilateral (and highly conditional), although France's contribution to the multilateral agencies is disproportional to its GDP share in the OECD. But increasingly, pressures are mounting for a re-assessment of aid policy, with cost-effectiveness as a central concern.

In future, French overseas aid will be redeployed towards selected 'emerging countries' with a view to expanding trade relations; aid to Africa will be reduced and concentrated on a few countries, notably Cote d'Ivoire, Cameroun, Congo, Gabon, Senegal and South Africa. Both bilateral conditionality and commitments to non-project aid will be reduced in favour of greater coordination with other 'donors' (including the Bretton Woods institutions). These changes in strategy will be accompanied by reforms in the French aid machinery, designed to 'modernise' and streamline administration. The creation of an inter-ministerial committee on aid and development (CIAD) in February 1996 is one important innovation; another is the larger role accorded to cooperation with NGOs. There will be resistance from those with vested interests in the old system, but significant change is on its way.
The distinguishing feature of the aid given to the developing world since the end of the 1980s has been its lack of growth, or to be more precise the way it has shrunk as a percentage of GDP. The average net sum of Overseas Development Aid (ODA) given by members of the OECD decreased from 0.34% of GDP in 1983/1984 to 0.30% in 1994 and 0.27% in 1995. The reasons most often cited to explain this phenomenon are the economic crisis in the industrialised countries and ‘aid fatigue’.

Within this scenario, France’s position is an anomaly, in that, up until 1994, it regularly and continuously increased the amount of aid given. The total overseas development aid bill rose from 44.819 billion Francs ($8.05bn) in 1993 to 47 billion Francs ($8.45bn) in 1994 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1996). These figures represent 0.64% of GDP in 1994 as against 0.59% in 1983/84 and 0.43% in 1973/74. This effort took France to the leading position amongst the world’s seven most industrialised countries and to fifth position among OECD member countries, after Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Holland. Even though this trend was significantly reversed in 1995, the amount of aid given was still 0.55% of GNP (Endnote 1) that year.

The importance France accords to its aid and co-operation policy lies in its colonial past of which the current aid policy is its ‘natural’ continuation. Despite the fact that the French state has had a succession of leaders with differing priorities, this policy has been consistently maintained. It has, however, gradually degenerated towards a client based system which has lead to increasing inflexibility. Under the pressure of external conditions and internal contradictions, it finally proved impossible to maintain the system and inevitably the CFA Franc had to be devalued, an event often seen as first tangible sign of the end of an era. A force for change is now coming into being in the area of aid policy and more specifically Franco-African relationships, leading to a certain number of reforms. However, there are good reasons to fear that many obstacles still stand in the way of a positive outcome.

**Bilateral Relations Prioritised**

Any study of the structure of French external aid will reveal the continuing primacy of bilateral forms of aid. In 1994, 78.7% of aid was distributed in the form of bilateral aid; in 1983/84 the proportion was 78.3. These figures put France in almost the same situation as Japan (72.2%) but far ahead of Great Britain (55.1%). The multilateral part of aid goes to the United Nations, the European Union and the international financial institutions.

*In terms of mandatory contributions, in 1994 France is the fifth largest contributor to the UNO, its subsidiary bodies and its specialised institutions (with a 6% share for the period 1992-1995)(OECD, 1995).*

The French contribution to the European Community’s co-operation policy totalled 5.083 billion Francs ($0.85bn) in 1994, which represents 49.5% of France’s total multilateral aid.

*In 1994, France continued to contribute to the strengthening of the international financial institutions’ resources at a level which is proportionally greater than its share in the GDP of OECD countries (OECD, 1995).*

In total, 3.806 billion Francs ($0.69m) were distributed by multilateral banks and development funds, accounting for 8.0% of the total French ODA; in 1994, the World Bank group received $0.444bn.

**The Bias Towards Africa**

Africa, or to be more specific sub-Saharan Africa, has long since been seen as a priority ‘arena’ for French foreign policy. Looked at in this way, the co-operation
policy practised under the fifth republic is an extension of the colonial policy which made Africa, and the franc area in particular, the main instrument of French power politics (Bayart, 1984; Adda & Smouts, 1989). Thus,

_sub-Saharan Africa is turned into a reserve (transformed into a 'private domain'); protected militarily by a set of bilateral treaties, it is the subject of personal diplomatic activity exercised to the regular rhythm of Franco-African summits which seem more like family gatherings where the members all gather to celebrate eternal friendship, a shared culture and a common destiny (Liman, 1996)._

Furthermore, maintaining a political clientele has proved useful to France, in particular in international institutions, because it has given it the rank and the prestige of a medium size power, particularly in the context of the East-West confrontation.

Under these conditions, aid to sub-Saharan Africa has always been a priority for the French government. Furthermore, this seems to have grown in importance during the last few years, despite the intensification of the economic crisis in Africa, as well as the devaluation of the CFA franc in 1994. In 1970/71, sub-Saharan Africa received 47.5% of French bilateral aid, in 1980/81 it received 48.7% and in 1993/94, 55.6%. The African countries in the franc area (PAZF), the area covering all the old French colonies, were always prioritised. In 1970/71, out of the fifteen main beneficiaries of French ODA, seven were PAFZ countries who received 15.4% of the total ODA (in terms of raw payments of the total bilateral and multilateral ODA); in 1993/94, the same countries received an even larger part of the aid (22.5%).

This bias towards Africa is a heavy constraint which makes it impossible to run a meaningful diversified aid policy because the French aid budget is limited. For example, the share of aid allotted to Africa north of the Sahara fell from 23.6% in 1970/71 to 14.5% in 1993/94. Similarly, the dynamic areas of southern Asia or Latin America only received 5.8% of French bilateral ODA between them in 1993/94.

**The Underlying Micro-economic Reasons**

As many authors have stressed, the justification for France's African policy cannot be reduced solely to the economic advantages it receives from the relationships it has with the continent. Trade with sub-Saharan Africa is no longer of strategic interest to France, and has not been for a long time now. In 1994, French exports to the franc area amounted to 12.5 billion francs and its imports from it to 10.5 billion. These movements represent less than one% of France's total external trade. In terms of balances, trade with Africa contributes 16% to the French favourable balance of trade, but trade with the franc area countries only amounts to 2.3%. Once a comparison is made between the total amount of trade and the aid figures, the macro-economic argument for the bias quickly evaporates.

However, 'we must not confuse the economic interests of French companies trading in Africa with those of the French economy as a whole' (Médard, n.d.). In other words, the highly conditional nature of the aid provided, can be used to distribute 'dividends' to a certain number of companies. French aid has always been highly conditional. For example, in 1993, 51.1% of French ODA was totally or partly conditional on purchases being made in the donor country. Whether individual companies benefit from this or not depends on whether they belong highly personalised networks, involving both public and private sector employees. There are also formal structures, such as the Centre for Promoting Industry in Africa, which bring together the private.
sector and the state institutions. This collusion between the public and private interests has led to a progressive increase in the patrimonial nature of Franco-African relationships which has resulted in increasingly inefficient aid. In February 1994, a writer on the subject stated:

"about a year ago, a study showed that out of 100 francs of French aid almost a quarter disappeared in illegal commissions, about 10% was used to pay French aid workers and the rest was used to buy French goods and services (Alternatives économiques, 1994)."

The direction that relations between France and its old colonies have taken has been greatly eased by the existence of this fragmented aid structure.

The Obscurity & Fragmented Nature of Aid Structures

The fact that the political and institutional aid mechanism is so fragmented has furthered the creation of client based networks and relations. At the head of these stands the Head of State, for whom foreign policy is a reserved area and African politics a 'hyper-reserved' area (Marchesin, 1995:14).

The Elysée's Africa unit, run by a special advisor, recruited by the president himself and generally surrounded by a limited number of collaborators is the body ... responsible for inoculating French institutions and the political elite of the 'private domain' with the idea of African priority (Leman, 1996).

At regular intervals, this structure calls together the main French players in co-operation policy (with the exception of the NGOs and local authorities), including the DGSE and the SGDN, who are responsible for external security and national defence respectively. The very existence of a separate ministry of co-operation to look after the countries in the area (the exact notion of the area tends to fluctuate, but up until 1995 it covered roughly the French speaking African countries of the old colonial empire) bears witness, in institutional terms, to the priority afforded to sub-Saharan Africa.

"The powers granted to the Minister for Co-operation tend to circumscribe his or her actions to the sphere of client base Franco-African relations (Leman, 1996)."

In particular, using the Aid and Co-operation Fund (FAC) works on the basis of donations. However, the distinction between in the area and not in the area leads to a rivalry between the Ministry of Co-operation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is responsible for aid to countries located outside the area in Africa and elsewhere. In practice, both ministries suffer from a lack of autonomy, reinforced by the fact that the Ministry of Economic and Financial Affairs controls more than half of the funds devoted to co-operation in the form of non-project related aid (budgetary aid, aid for the balance of payments). The French Development Fund (CFD, formerly the Central Fund for Economic Co-operation), a public industrial and commercial body (Epic) – is a specialised financial institution (IFS) under the control of the Ministry of Economic and Financial Affairs. The CFD seeks to promote economic and social development in sub-Saharan Africa, the Maghreb, and in various Pacific ocean, Indian ocean, Asian and Caribbean states, as well as the French overseas departments and territories, by granting long term loans and subsidies. The CFD has several specialised subsidiaries, in particular the society for promoting and participating in economic co-operation (PROPARCO) which finances private companies in its field of competence.

"The way areas of responsibility have been divided between the various players is based on a compromise between
'geographical criteria, criteria concerning the instruments and the area of intervention: the Ministry of Finance handles financial support, the CFD deals with economic adjustment and investment in productive sectors, the Ministry of Cooperation is in charge of investment in social sectors and technical aid and specialist operations are left to the other ministries (Naudet, 1995).

Although there are many active French NGOs, they do not take part in the definition of co-operation policy.

In 1992, 1% of bilateral ODA was disbursed through NGOs. This is supposed to reach 5% by 2002. Many of the several hundred French NGOs are involved actively in French co-operation programmes, through project identification and preparation, implementation, evaluation, studies and discussions. Discussions with the Government appear to focus more on the project and programme level than on overall co-operation policy (Kooij & Mevis, 1994).

The fact that there are so many players has made it possible to maintain an obscurity in the decision making and functional processes which has made it easier to use the networks mentioned above to set up and maintain two-way ('kick-back' financing of French political parties) client-based relationships.

Inevitable Crisis

The attempt to continue with these relationships in a climate marked by environmental turbulence, both economic and political, has inevitably led to a crisis. On the one hand, Africa is becoming relatively less important a prize, both in geo-strategic terms in the post cold war period and in economic terms for French companies faced with globalisation. On the other, the enduring economic crisis suffered by Africa has led most of the member states to circumvent the rules of the franc area and use the French 'umbrella' to defer the reforms demanded by the Bretton-Woods institutions. Because of the French strategy of putting forward a specific form of adjustment in Africa, better adapted to the context and less harsh, the international organisations have tended to disengage themselves, with a corresponding increase of the cost of maintaining the status quo. At the start of the 1990s, in a situation where the overwhelming necessity was to converge towards the criteria dictated by the Maastricht treaty, the franc area became too costly a burden (Michailoff, 1995:124) for France. Given the situation, the reassessment of aid policy therefore gradually imposed itself as a necessity.

A More Efficient Use of Aid

The La Baule conference, featuring the speech by François Mitterand where he hinted at the formulation of political conditions for aid to Africa linked to democratisation, did not live up to expectations. It was the statement of the Abidjan doctrine, in 1993, which put change into gear. By making French non-project-related aid conditional on the drawing up of agreements with the IMF, Edouard Balladur prepared the way for the devaluation of the CFA franc and to accepting sharing influence over the 'private domain' with the Bretton-Woods institutions. This represented a complete reassessment of the foundations of Franco-African relationships which would be reflected in the aid field by a primary objective of greater efficiency.

Redeployment

Contrary to most donors, France, under the constraints imposed by its large donations to sub-Saharan Africa, finds 'profitable' by opening up really promising markets. Given the budgetary constraints, the necessity to redeploy ODA will mean that funds will have to be distributed more selectively. The consequences of this new approach are that less aid is being given to the franc area and
the flow of funds is being redirected to ‘useful’ Africa and other dynamic geographic areas. In 1994, the year in which the CFA franc was devalued, the sum of French aid given to the franc area reached its all time high, due to the cost of the compensatory measures. In the year immediately following, the statement of accounts in the franc area shows a decrease in the flow of funds:

the relative deficit due to unilateral transfers has been considerably reduced, with smaller public transfers from France in favour of the countries in the franc area (Banque de France, 1996).

Furthermore, within that area, the old metropolitan power is concentrating its efforts on regional powers (Côte d’Ivoire, Cameroun) and petrol producers (Congo, Gabon); Senegal being, or so it seems, the country which has been most successful in ‘selling’ its process of democratisation to western funding agencies. Also, in May 1996, the Minister of Economic and Financial Affairs announced that aid would be redeployed towards certain ‘emerging countries’ which would be implemented by reforming the bodies responsible for supporting external trade and by redeploying economic development personnel. Priority geographic targets consisting of eight countries were defined: South Africa, Brazil, China, Korea, India, Indonesia, Mexico and Russia, all of them countries where the French market share is less than 5%. These new priorities were also expressed in financial terms: ‘we have decided to create a reserve of several hundred million francs for the emerging nations (Galland, 1996).

The Decrease in Bilateral and Conditional Aid

Although it is noticeable that this geographic reorientation has been formulated with the purpose of opening up new markets, it should also lead to a structural change which will make aid both more efficient and less susceptible to pressure applied by clients.

There is an inseparable highly personal dimension to bilateral aid because it brings governments into direct relationships ... it is often conditional on the placing of orders or client type relationships (Conte, 1995).

The Marchand report denounced the excessive conditionality of French aid, symbolic of a protectionist attitude which is totally anachronistic in today’s world. Apart from the fact that French companies ‘do not need this public crutch’ (Marchand, 1996:109), conditional aid has a certain number of disadvantages springing from its high cost (in particular because it generates guaranteed incomes in captive markets), its inefficiency and the difficulty of managing it. Furthermore, prioritising this kind of aid isolates France politically from the other OECD members. Therefore the report recommends the loosening the conditions on aid by abandoning the source of materials and service clauses which, if it were extended to the whole of the European Union, would give French companies access ‘to markets in Asia and Latin America which are more promising, in terms of rising standards of living or their general environment, than those that they would ‘lose’, due to the same measures, in Africa’ (Ibid.). The Marchand report also specifies that

priority should be given to project-related aid which helps with investment directly ... and ... finances the future, to the detriment of non-project related aid which first tries to redeem the past (Marchand, 1996:156).

At present, the French aid machine is ‘burdened with large non-project related aid expenses’. Therefore, it must continue to reduce this type of aid, as it has done for the last few years (in 1995 the decrease was 37%). The consequence of this
reduction for receiving countries is that they will have to control their need for budgetary aid. France must contribute to this gaining of control in partnership with the IMF, the World Bank, the European Union and the African states themselves. This means that donors must continue to make their interventions conditional on the countries concerned with signing of structural adjustment programme agreements with the IMF. According to the same report, the preceding economic conditionality should be accompanied by a series of institutional conditions made up of performance criteria and financial sanctions.

More urgently now than in the past, aid policy must take steps to reform the institutional environment in the strictest sense (rule of law, financial institutions, privatisations, regional integration) in the ways which investors require ... donors (France among them) must ... apply continual pressure and make aid conditional on institutional reforms (Marchand, 1996:31).

The Bretton-Woods institutions should be made responsible for checking on these new conditions because 'as they are mandated' they can take entire responsibility for enforcing the conditions ... without having to take the consequences of increasing tensions in the bilateral relationships between donor countries and receiving countries (Marchand, 1996:109).

Furthermore, given the inevitable stagnation (or to be more honest, reduction) in the amounts devoted to aid, France can use the multilateral channel as a financial lever to make its aid seem more important to the receivers. More than half of French multilateral aid is channelled via the European Union, making France the leading European nation in 1996. It might then be supposed that France, as the leader, could influence, to a certain degree, how European resources are allocated. Finally, this strategy allows France to adopt the advantageous position of advocate of Africa, and the third world in general, to international bodies.

Uncoupling aid, strengthening project aid and making aid multilateral seems to be the dominant trends in French cooperation policy. For these trends to prevail the aid machine will have to be reformed.

Reforming the Aid Machine

First of all, the aid machine has to be made more suitable for serving the new objectives. For this reason, in 1995, the Elysée’s Africa unit was reduced to one advisor with two assistants, one of whom is a general inspector from the Bank of France. Given the people in it – it is directed by Michel Dupuch, a career diplomat 'with a reputation of knowing how to distance himself from African leaders' (Bourmand, 1996:436) – this structure should prove favourable to the reform of Franco-African relations. The Elysée’s Africa unit is still duplicated by an unofficial structure run by Jacques Foccart and Fernand Wilbaux who are partisans of the status quo. The Ministry for Co-operation has been placed under the control of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and, at the same time, had its field of action increased to all the ACP countries (71 countries instead of 37). In order to optimise the coherence of the machine, the government should have, as they announced, simply eliminate the Ministry for Co-operation and group together all France's diplomatic and economic activities abroad under the sole authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; however, it failed to do it. The creation of an inter-ministerial aid and development committee (CIAD) in February 1996 appears to be a compromise. This committee will bring together all the different governmental development sections together once a year to 'define the directions for public development aid, in both bilateral and multilateral forms, and approve an annual report on the evaluation
and the efficiency of OPA' (Marchés Tropicaux, 16 February 1996). 'Once again, the partisans of continuity have known how to defend their domaine' (Bourmand, 1996:439). Finally, if we are to believe the declarations of French officials, a larger role will be accorded to co-operation with local bodies and NGOs (OECD, 1995). It seems that the modernisation of the French aid machine is slow in showing concrete results because of political compromises which are aimed at accommodating both those who are for and those who are against the reform.

A Force Being Hindered by Political Compromise

Encouraged by the prevailing neo-liberal political climate and the obligation to share French influence over the private domain, the force for reform finds itself confronted by a ratchet and pawl of privileged positions. The way the political powers try to accommodate them can be seen in the duality of both discourses and facts, by compromises which result in pseudo-reforms. Thus we see reappearing ideas which are prohibited by the Bretton-Woods institutions, via the notion of 'good governance' stressed by Jacques Chirac during the Franco-African summit in 1996. Whilst at the same time numerous hostages were given to the partisans of the status quo when he said 'we have a community of interests ... today, the destiny of France and that of sub-Saharan Africa are closely linked' (memo, 1996), and underlined the 'special situation' of Africa both in economic and political terms. The duality of the political discourse corresponds, as we have seen, to a certain half-heartedness, or even a wait-and-see attitude, in the process of reform.

Finally, however, while the force for change may be slowed they will not be impeded: too many changes have taken place in Africa and elsewhere for an anachronistic system with roots in the colonial past to endure. The inevitable change in French aid policy will feature a reduction in its global scope, the end of the African bias, a preoccupation with the efficient use of funds in terms of economic 'profitability' and a more open attitude towards de-centralised co-operation (NGOs and local bodies)

Bernard Conte, Centre d'Etude d'Afrique Noire, Université Montesquieu, Bordeaux IV, France. Translated by Phil Grantham.

Endnote

1. In 1994 the franc area received 12.118 billion francs in bilateral ODA. During that period, the countries in the franc area which received the most important sums were, in descending order: Côte d'Ivoire (29.8%), Cameroun (14.1%), Senegal (12.9%), Congo (10.4%) and Gabon (6.9%).

Bibliography

Among Africa specialists and internationalists in the United States today there is much discussion about the marginalization of Africa and the continuing assault on assistance programs for the continent. On the surface in Washington it appears that the much trumpeted Republican assault on foreign aid is succeeding.

By 1996 the US Congress had cut development assistance to Africa by almost 25% and effectively eliminated a special law that sought to direct funds particularly to grassroots, long-term development projects. Most devastating from the point of view of many African governments, Congress has effectively withdrawn all funding for the World Bank’s low interest loan program to the poorest countries for the three year period beginning in 1997.

But in fact although there have been deep cuts in foreign assistance a coalition of NGO contractors, Africa advocacy groups, businesses and legislators have managed to forge a consensus that could prevent further cuts in bilateral assistance and preserve between $600 and $675 million for Africa for the next several years. The Clinton administration is also making a bid to restore some funding for the World Bank’s International Development Association that directs nearly 50% of its long term, low interest loans to Africa.

In effect what is emerging is a new debate about what the US role has in Africa. In the long term there will undoubtedly be fewer dollars for Africa and the rhetorical interest in ‘sustainable development’ that was a hallmark of the first years of the Clinton administration has given way to more direct linkages between foreign aid and US political interests, business and
The US: Backing out of Africa

Jim Cason

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trade interests and humanitarian crisis. The consequence is an aid program ever more directly tied to private sector development, with shorter time-frames and demands for quicker results and a program that increasingly prioritizes easy-to-justify humanitarian assistance over long term development.

It would be a mistake, however, to argue that these priorities represent a radical departure from the goals that have motivated aid programs in the past. The US foreign aid program has always been an adjunct to Washington’s political and economic interests. Globally the top recipients of US foreign aid continue to be Israel and Egypt which together account for $5 billion of the $12 billion program. According to the US Agency for International Development, 62% of all US aid in 1996 went to Israel and Egypt, Eastern Europe or the Newly Independent States of the former Soviet Union. Staff salaries and operating expenses consumed another 11%. What remains is divided between sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and Asia and the Near East (and almost half of this money is food aid, or emergency relief for refugees and other humanitarian efforts). Money earmarked for ‘development activities’ totalled $1.6 billion in the 1996 fiscal year.

Furthermore, the cuts in foreign development aid did not begin with the Republican Congress that came to power in 1995. In the ten years ending in 1995, while funding for US strategic allies in the Middle East and Eastern Europe has been protected, funds available for ‘development assistance’ have been cut by 50%. And in effect, during that period because funding for Africa has actually grown, funding for Asia and Latin America has been cut dramatically. This said, it is also true that the emergence of a Republican Congress and the increasing focus domestically in the United States on ending government assistance programs even to citizens of this country has helped to erode further any support for foreign assistance. It has also virtually guaranteed that all US assistance must be justified first and foremost by how well it advances short term US political and economic interests.

US assistance to Africa, of course, has always been driven by national interest calculations. Between 1962 and 1992 the top recipients of US economic and military assistance in Africa were Sudan ($1,955 million), Zaire ($1,325 million), Kenya ($1,252 million), Ethiopia ($1,094 million), Somalia ($952 million) and Liberia ($937 million). The passage of the Development Fund for Africa in 1987 was designed to focus foreign aid more on long term, grassroots, sustainable development. In practice, however, after the end of the cold war priorities shifted toward other political goals such as supporting the transition to market economies or cultivating warm relations with new important governments (South Africa being a prime example) and addressing humanitarian crisis. A recent study by the US government’s General Accounting Office concluded:

> foreign aid has primarily served US political purposes over the last several decades and ... often there has been little demonstration that aid programs have effectively served economic development goals.

Policy makers in the US continue to view foreign aid as leverage to force political shifts in Africa or as a mechanism for cultivating better relations with particular African governments.

Nevertheless, the amount of money allocated to development projects in Africa did increase from about $400 million in 1987 to a peak of $870 million in 1995; equally significant, the total amount of US funds allocated to projects in Africa expanded as well. According to aid officials, in 1995 development aid was less than half of all the foreign assistance the US was providing to Africa. Added to the
$870 million allocated to development was $555 million in food aid, $117 million is disaster assistance and several hundred million dollars indirectly provided to Africa through the World Bank’s IDA program. Altogether, the US that year was providing more than $1,800 million directly and indirectly in aid to Africa.

In 1995 there were proposals to cut development aid to Africa by more than 40%. In the end the Congress essentially ended the practice of specifying a precise amount of money that should be spent on development projects in Africa but offered advisory language that suggested spending of between $630 and $675 million. For 1996 development aid was about 25% below 1995 levels and USAID was forced to cut 10 of its missions in Africa (plans call for six more to also be closed). The total of development aid, food aid and disaster assistance was about $1,200 million, significantly below the $1,547 billion spent in 1995 before even taking into account indirect US assistance to Africa through IDA or other multilateral agencies. The recent assaults on foreign aid have both seriously eroded the dollar amounts of aid provided to Africa and also undermined whatever small efforts individuals and institutions within the US government have undertaken to craft programs that contribute to long term, sustainable development.

**Future US Aid to Africa**

Despite the Republican rhetoric, direct US assistance to Africa appears to have stabilized, albeit at reduced levels. And although some members of Congress continue to call for new cuts in aid to Africa, in 1997 the budget for development funds to Africa is approximately the same as in the previous year – $630 million to $675 million.

‘My best bet is that bilateral development assistance for Africa will be pretty steady for the next couple of years’, said analyst David Gordon of the Overseas Development Council at the end of 1996. Gordon, who worked in Congress for many years and before that worked at USAID, acknowledges that when the Republicans first took over Congress he thought they might just keep cutting bilateral aid down to next to nothing. But now he reports an emerging bipartisan consensus in favour of continuing direct bilateral development aid to Africa at a level of just over $600 million. What is less easy to divine is what will happen to the other US assistance to Africa. Food aid and disaster assistance will probably continue at similar levels (food aid in particular is likely to continue if for no other reason that it is a form of price support for US farmers).

The biggest cuts in US assistance to Africa in the next few years will be the cuts in funding for the World Bank’s IDA program. IDA, or the International Development Association, provides long term loans at concessional rates to the poorest countries in the world. An estimated 40 to 50% of all IDA lending goes to countries in Africa. Although governments and NGOs in Africa are critical of the way IDA projects are run, many Africans argue that these funds are critical for Africa’s development needs.

For members of Congress looking for ways to cut the federal budget deficit the $1 billion annual US appropriation to IDA is an easy target. Initially in 1996 the Congress eliminated all of that money but after some last minute lobbying by the Clinton administration the Congress did allocate about $700 million to IDA in 1997. All of those funds, however, went to pay what the US still owes for IDA operations in previous years and as of the end of 1996 the Congress has declined to provide any funds to support IDA’s work in the 1997 to 1999 period. In February 1997 the Clinton administration will ask for additional funds to support IDA’s program in 1997 but this request will come at the same time that the White House is also asking for funds to pay
back dues owed to the United Nations. With a new Secretary General at the UN in large part because of pressure from the US there will be an intense effort to ensure that the US makes up at least some of the back debt it owes to that international organization. The result is that it will be even more difficult to get money for IDA.

There is virtually no constituency for the IDA programs in Washington. The Clinton administration has argued that these funds are necessary because they support political stability and development and because supporting developing countries is in the US national interest. ‘In 1995, US exports to the 79 countries eligible for IDA funding from the World Bank totalled approximately $26 billion,’ said Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin in an early 1997 speech. ‘During the same period countries that have graduated from IDA funding imported roughly $60 billion worth of American goods and services.’

But there has been very little other support for these programs. Although African Ambassadors in Washington and some African NGO groups have argued forcefully that these funds must be continued, groups on the left are ambivalent at best or often openly hostile to supporting World Bank programs in Africa or anywhere else. At best these groups offer verbal support for the IDA programs but fail to engage in the types of real, broad band campaigns that could insist that IDA funds are fully restored.

Some of the most powerful of the Washington-based NGOs also have little material interest in supporting IDA, particularly if they believe that supporting multilateral institutions might diminish bilateral aid. The largest NGOs and private aid contracting groups, some of which rely on USAID funds for between 60 and 80% of their budgets, distribute food aid in Africa, run scholarship or exchange programs, conduct private enterprise or small entrepreneurship projects and offer a myriad of other services. In theory these NGO contractors can assist in developing grassroots driven, consultative development projects more sensitive to the needs of the recipients of US aid. In practice funnelling money through these organizations also sustains and in some cases creates a powerful constituency for US bilateral aid. This constituency has a great interest in bilateral US aid to Africa that they can benefit from but very little material interest in aid to Africa through groups like IDA. As a result, although all of these groups will rhetorically support IDA funds, their real lobbying effort goes to support bilateral aid.

The Shift to NGOs

These types of pressures are likely to increase as US relies increasingly on NGOs to manage and run development projects in Africa. In 1981 only 9.6% of Africa bureau grants for development projects were allocated to NGOs and private voluntary organizations. By 1993 the figure had grown to 21.2% and by 1996 aid officers estimated it was as high as 30%. Although the US has for a long time relied on NGOs to distribute food aid in parts of Africa, the Clinton administration has promoted the use of NGOs as contractors on aid projects. Vice President Al Gore suggested several years ago that by the end of this decade the administration hopes that 50% of all US development funds will be distributed through NGOs.

But this shift to NGOs also creates new pressures for particular types of assistance. Many of the biggest NGOs are also primarily charities that raise money from the public with appeals about famine and starvation accompanied by pictures of helpless dying children. For these NGOs and for many people in the general public in this country the primary purpose of
foreign aid is help in times of disaster. As one NGO official interviewed by the author explained:

It is much easier to say we kept 100,000 people from starving, or gave seeds and shovels to 40,000 subsistence farmers or helped demobilize a group of soldiers than it is to describe some long-term development project with much less measurable goals.

The tendencies are reinforced and sustained by government officials back in Washington who politically have a much easier time convincing Congress of the need to feed starving people or help displaced refugees. The result is that an ever growing portion even of the so-called ‘development assistance’ budget for Africa is redirected toward very short term humanitarian relief or in some cases medium term relief projects. Although USAID officers dispute this assessment, and they note that some programs such as the recent Greater Horn of Africa Initiative are designed specifically to try and provide aid to prevent humanitarian crisis, the dollars devoted to development continue to decline.

Analysts who have looked closely at these development programs argue that more and more of the money is going to feed hungry people, clear landmines, provide seeds and tools to help displaced people plant crops or provide condoms and other birth control devices for local populations. Many of these projects are essential to any future long term development efforts, but they do little to create or support structures that will allow Africans to continue these efforts once the foreign aid dollars have dried up. There are of course any number of other projects that USAID officials can legitimately point to that are helping to strengthen the capacity of local institutions to undertake rehabilitation and development, but the sums of money spent on these projects are regularly being cut by policy makers responding to the latest humanitarian crisis.

The most popular counterforce to these arguments in Washington is the lobby that argues that US trade to Africa can ultimately replace US aid. The Clinton administration has developed a trade policy for Africa and several members of Congress have created a ‘Congressional Caucus on Africa Trade and Investment’. Aid officials in this country arguing for long term development aid are increasingly trying to make the rather tenuous argument that foreign aid to Africa will create markets for US products. ‘Africa is today what the Latin American and Asian markets were a generation ago. It is the last great developing market’, argued USAID director Brian Atwood in 1995. ‘In 1993, sub-Saharan Africa imported $63 billion worth of merchandise goods from the rest of the world. America’s share of this market is 10%, but it has been growing. African imports have risen by around 7% a year for the past decade. At this rate, the African market would amount to $480 billion by the year 2025. These figures represent millions of [US] jobs.’

There is of course much unrealized potential for Africa as a market for US goods, but even in the medium term it is difficult to argue that if the goal is simply to promote US exports a dollar spent in Africa is as productive as a dollar spent in Asia or Latin America. Furthermore, much of the US trade and investment in Africa is focused on a very few of the countries, while the poorest countries most in need of assistance have virtually no hope of attracting significant trade or investment.

There are also some national organizations that lobby for more aid to Africa simply because it is the right thing to do, or the moral thing to do (in the case particularly of some religious organizations) or because it is something that
African Americans in this country believe is particularly important because of their historic links to the continent. But the constituencies behind these organizations are much more diffuse than they were even a decade ago and their power in an era of growing cuts in programs for the poor in the US is less and less.

Even more seriously, the constituencies of these organizations are increasingly having to fight for resources for communities in the United States. Ultimately the most powerful force undermining US foreign assistance is the political climate in this country. It is popular within both of the major political parties in this country to argue that the role of government today is to provide not a 'guarantee' of jobs, health care and housing but an 'opportunity' to achieve these goals. After more than half a century of guaranteeing every American a basic right to food and shelter, the welfare legislation approved in 1996 essentially states the federal government will no longer consider this a basic right of all citizens. Budget cuts have reduced and in some cases ended long established government programs in the United States designed to help the poor. At the same time, there are now discussions about how government can cut back on federally supported health care and retirement programs for the elderly. These cutbacks come at a time in the US when basic levels of inequality are rising.

The richest one per cent of the population now controls one-third of all the wealth, about the same amount of money in dollars terms as the wealth of the bottom 90%. The richest 10% of the population controls two-thirds of all the wealth in this country. In the first two years of the Clinton administration these trends accelerated.

In this climate politicians have an even harder time supporting foreign aid programs designed to help eliminate poverty, address income inequalities and support long term, sustainable development. At the recent World Food Summit when delegates tried to introduce a resolution supporting 'The Basic Right to Food' of all peoples, US government representatives objected. Publicly they argued that this type of resolution was not helpful in the international institutions, but in private the same US officials were more blunt: 'We can't support the basic right to food in the international community when we are cutting off food aid programs in the United States', said one official.

Ironically, just as the World Bank is beginning to recognize that economic growth is a necessary, but not sufficient factor for promoting development, that their programs to date have done little to fundamentally address growing inequality and poverty and that there may be a legitimate role for the state in certain areas, the pressures from the US are moving in the other direction.

What then can be expected of US assistance programs in the future? There will continue to be some US aid to Africa, albeit not at the levels of the past. What appears likely to happen is that this aid will increasingly be channelled through NGO actors and more and more of the dollars will be focused on the short term humanitarian crisis areas that receive press attention.

There will also be new efforts to further tie US assistance programs to US political objectives in Africa. The Congress is expected to renew attempts to physically combine the bureaucracy that administers the US assistance program with the Department of State and in an era of shrinking budgets these efforts may well succeed. But in the absence of Cold War strategic priorities, it is more and more difficult to discern what specific long term policy priorities the US policymakers define in Africa.
Much of US policy toward Africa appears to be driven by images of starvation and humanitarian crisis on CNN and by the political calculation that support for projects in Africa can translate into votes from the African American community in the United States. In this climate aid to Africa will be directed primarily to efforts to address immediate short-term crisis and to countries such as Nelson Mandela’s South Africa that still have some political cachet.

Jim Cason, Association of Concerned African Scholars, Washington, DC.

Japanese Aid and Africa

David Seddon with Makoto Sato

Japan: the Emerging ‘Giant’ of International Aid

During the latter part of the 1970s, Japanese official development aid increased from $1.4bn in 1977 to $3.3bn in 1980. Dennis Yasutomo has observed that during the first half of the 1980s, ‘in an era of fiscal austerity and zero-growth national budgets, when the Japanese government forces belt-tightening measures on its own people, one budget item has been extended special treatment and exempted from severe spending cuts – money for foreign aid’ (Yasumoto, 1986:1). In 1981, the Suzuki Zenko cabinet pledged another doubling in five years. The fiscal austerity policy, foreign exchange rate fluctuations, recipient nation’s absorptive capacities, and other problems prevented Japan from fulfilling the aid doubling pledge. Even so, Japan’s performance during the first half of the 1980s catapulted it to the status of the world’s third largest donor by 1983 and to number two (displacing France) by 1984. Through-out the first half of the decade, the rate of growth in expenditure on foreign aid varied between 9 and 13% a year. Overall, between 1981 and 1985, Japanese ODA enjoyed a 31.5% increase. In mid-1984, Japan became the second largest supplier of funds to the World Bank. By 1991, Japan had become the world’s largest aid ‘donor’ – a position it was to maintain over the next five years.

In 1995, the total of aid from the 21 OECD ‘donors’ was just under $60bn. Of this, about $14.5bn was from Japan – now firmly established as the largest aid ‘donor’ in the world, allocating nearly twice as much as the US (which has slumped to a position below France and Germany in terms of the total amount allocated). As Japan has become an increasingly important source of foreign aid, it has also sought to increase its global political and diplomatic influence, both through its bilateral relationships with other states and within the major international agencies.

Important though it now undoubtedly has become as a major ‘donor’, Japan’s economic dominance is still not fully reflected in its position within the multilateral agencies, although it certainly has an important voice in both the IMF and the World Bank, and in the UN more generally. The day-to-day activities of the IMF, for example are closely controlled by the executive directors, five of whom are appointed by the US, Britain, France, Germany and Japan. In the World Bank, Japan is second only to the US in the total number of votes it holds, but while the US holds nearly 250,000 in the IBRD, Japan has only 94,000 (6.6% of the total votes held by all states compared with the US‘ 17.4%). One of the five executive directors representing single countries is Japanese the others being, as in the IMF, the US, Britain, France and Germany).

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The growing influence of Japan within the World Bank can be gauged to some extent by the publication in 1993 of the
study on *The East Asian Miracle* which recognises the existence of a major alternative development strategy to that which the Bank has advocated throughout the last decade or so. In 1996, Japan was elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for a two-year term from 1997; this will be Japan’s eighth term as a non-permanent member of the Security Council. Pressure is certainly growing for a permanent place for Japan in the Security Council.

The rapid growth of Japanese aid in volume terms, and its increasingly important role in the multilateral agencies, has been accompanied by an increase in the geographical scope of its bilateral foreign aid allocation. Japanese aid began in the 1950s essentially as post-war reparations to Asian countries. Even in 1970, over 98% of Japanese aid went to Asia. This began to change during the 1970s as the Japanese government developed a more comprehensive international perspective on Japan’s role and began to look in a more considered fashion outside Asia. Japanese aid officials are reported to explain that:

*in the 1960s, the main motives for Japan’s economic cooperation were to promote its exports and assist its industries in overseas investment ... In the 1970s, especially after the oil crisis, the role of economic assistance as a means of securing raw materials such as oil came to be stressed ... In the 1980s ... the political and security sides of the objectives of economic cooperation are starting to receive greater emphasis* (cited in Yasutomo, 1986:9).

Japanese aid has tended, perhaps more than in the case of any other ‘donor’, to be explicitly tied to Japan’s own economic self-interest; in the early 1980s, whereas Norway, New Zealand and Australia provided 100 per cent of the official aid in the form of grants, Britain’s aid was 95 per cent grants, and even the US 82% grants. In Japan the percentage of aid committed as grants was only 44%. By the beginning of the 1990s it was recognised that:

*in terms of the quality of Japan’s aid, room exists for improvement. Although Japan’s aid increasingly takes the form of untied assistance ... the proportion of outright gifts and grant elements remains low compared with other DAC countries* (JICA Annual Report, 1993:14).

One consequence of Japan’s concern to develop a base for greater international influence, and the corresponding diversification of its official assistance programme away from Asia (the percentage of allocations for Asia in JICA expenses declined from 49.1% of the total in 1987 to 43% by 1992), has been a generally increased involvement in other regions, including Latin America and Africa over the last decade or so. The most pressing concern in the mid-1970s was the need to secure access to raw materials and particularly to oil, but through the 1980s and into the 1990s, a more general concern to increase Japanese influence worldwide has been evident. In 1994, for example, when substantial increases were agreed by most ‘donor’ countries for the funding of the Washington-based Inter-American Development Bank, Japan increased its holding from 1 to 5% (Britain decided, against the trend, not to increase its current 0.97% holding). As a result of Japan’s commitment, the non-regional members of the IADB took their shares from 7% to 16%, to justify an extra third seat on the board of directors.

**Japanese Aid and Africa**

In 1972, Africa absorbed only 1% of Japan’s official development assistance. But this was to change in the coming years. In 1973, Japan joined the African Development Fund and the next year Foreign Minister Toshio Kimura visited Africa – the first Japanese foreign minister to do so. He spent time in Nigeria,
Zaire, Ghana, Tanzania and Egypt. Kimura explained later how the 'oil shock' forced him to recognise the vulnerability of the Japanese economy and to consider the need for a wider approach to international relations. After the second oil 'sock' of 1979, Toshio Kimura's successor, Naoshi Sonoda, visited Nigeria, Ivory Coast, and Senegal in West Africa and Tanzania and Kenya in East Africa.

Increasing concern within Asia – and particularly in Southeast Asia – about Japan's role as an aid 'donor' with strategic political objectives as well as a concern for economic development in that region also undoubtedly also encouraged the diversification of Japanese foreign aid. It was during this period that a vision of comprehensive national security was actively developed and promoted. In such a context, it becomes clear why successive foreign ministers visited not only Nigeria (a major oil producer) but also other leading countries with influence within the sub-continent. Whatever the reasons, Japanese ODA to Africa multiplied by 2.3% between 1973 and 1984; already by 1981, Africa's share of Japanese ODA had increased to 9.3%.

Japan became a full member of the African Development Bank in 1983. In 1985, after the Reagan-Nakasone summit, several leading figures in the Reagan administration demanded that Japan should make stronger efforts to deal with its massive trade and balance of payments surplus. ODA, together with the promotion of imports and expansion of domestic consumption, was one element in a strategy to counter the surplus. Over the next few years both the total and the proportion of ODA allocated to Africa increased. The total allocation to Africa increased from just under $420mn in 1986 to $1.3bn in 1995. The proportion rose from 13.8% (in 1987) to 15.2% (in 1989); it then declined from 14.7% (in 1990) to 12% (in 1992). The overall proportion of Japanese aid going to Africa throughout the period from 1954 to 1992 was 13.1% (compared with 47% to Asia, 22% to Latin America, and 9% to the Middle East).

In the 1990s the main recipients of Japanese aid have been Kenya (19% in 1992), Zambia (14%) and Tanzania (14%). During the period 1992 to 1994, Japan has been the fourth largest bilateral 'donor' to Africa, after France, the US and Germany; for seven countries, including notably Kenya, Ghana and Zambia, it has been the largest. In 1995-96, Japan and Germany together accounted for 55% of foreign aid to Kenya and Japanese aid to Kenya grew by nearly 350% between 1991-92 and 1995-96.

Major areas of cooperation have included agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining, health and medical care, education, social infrastructure, telecommunications and broadcasting, transportation, and traffic control. More generally, in Africa, a large proportion of technical cooperation goes for agricultural development (including post-harvest industries), human resources development and basic transport and telecommunications infrastructure. Increasing in importance is support for environmental programmes and projects.

Japan's ODA to countries in the African region is characterised by a relatively large percentage of grant aid. In fiscal year 1991, grant aid accounted for 53% of Japan's total net outlays to this region, compared to the 14% that it accounts for in total bilateral ODA; by 1995 the proportion of grant aid was just over 60%, with 18.4% going in technical assistance.

In June 1992, the Japanese government adopted the Official Development Assistance Charter, which for the first time clearly delineated a philosophy and the principles underlying Japan's ODA. Along with humanitarian concerns and recognition of interdependence, the Charter includes a concern for the environment, with the explicit recommendation that programmes to assist self-help efforts by developing countries should take proper
account of environmental and other key issues, such as the extent of democratic reform and military spending.

With respect to political conditionality, however, Japan continues to pursue a line of 'constructive engagement' and appears not to be concerned to press for political reforms; its position is that strict conditionality and enforcement may be justifiable economically, but not politically. In this respect it may be said to be 'soft' on conditionality. With respect to South Africa, however, its position gradually hardened through the late 1980s and early 1990s. Already the major trading partner for South Africa by 1987, Japan introduced tougher sanctions against the apartheid regime and demanded that Japanese enterprises be 'self-disciplined' in their dealings with South Africa. From 1990, Japan began to provide aid to anti-apartheid groups in South Africa through international NGOs and other organisations. After the inauguration of the ANC government in 1994, Japan pledged a large aid package worth $1.3bn ($0.3bn for ODA, $0.5bn for a loan by the Japan External Trade Bank and $0.5bn for trade insurance).

In 1993, Japan sent troops from the Japanese Self Defence Forces (SDF) to take part in the peacekeeping operation in Mozambique (ONUMOZ); its first such involvement in Africa and its second anywhere after its participation in the UN operations in Cambodia. In his assessment of Japanese aid strategy in Africa (in ROAPE no. 59, 1994) Makoto Sato concluded, however, that '(t)he Japanese government did not send SDF to participate in ONUMOZ as a deep consideration or sympathy for the Mozambican people. Japan was more concerned with its strategic position in the Western world, particularly with its relationship with the 'seven member states'. Japan wanted to be recognised for its contribution to the world community under the post-cold war world order. In other words, the issue was understood by the Japanese leaders more as a North-North cooperation and/or struggle over the post-cold war hegemony rather than as a North-South problem' (p. 110). In 1994, Japanese special forces were sent to the Rwandan refugee camps in Zaire as part of the international humanitarian assistance initiative.

In addition to a primary concern with global issues and problems, the 1992 Charter declared that Japanese ODA would be guided by four other priorities: basic human needs, human resources development together with research and other cooperation for the improvement and dissemination of technologies, infrastructure improvement and structural adjustment. As regards the last of these, Japan has become increasingly critical of earlier structural adjustment policy, notably of that pursued by the World Bank.

In October 1996, prior to a meeting of the UN General Assembly, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced publication of the most recent version of the ODA White Paper, which suggested that assistance to Africa was to be seen not just in a regional, but also in a global context humanitarian crises, environmental problems, and the spread of HIV-AIDS (all particularly acute in Africa) were also global issues. As a specific measure it was proposed that Japan host the second Tokyo International Conference on African Development in 1998 (the first was in 1993), focus on support for primary education, contribute to a programme for the extermination of poliomyelitis and invite 3,000 Africans to Japan for training.

There can be little doubt that, as other bilateral 'donors' restructure their ODA with a view to increasing cost-effectiveness (as in the case of France) or simply downsizing their overall commitment (as with the US), Japan's role in Africa will increase in significance.
This section gives brief notes of books recently received which may be of interest to our readers; some may be reviewed in depth at a later date. If you would like to review books for ROAPE, please get in touch with the book reviews editors Roy Love (at the ROAPE office) or Ray Bush and Morris Szeftel (Politics Department, University of Leeds). Compiled by Roy Love.


This book consists of six chapters and an extended introductory overview by the editors. Although coming mainly from a mainstream economic and institutionalist perspective the product is a reasonably well balanced mix of economic and political discussion. This is evident in the editors' opening statement that a consensus has emerged in the development policy community during the past decade about the causes of Africa's economic crisis. In this consensus adverse international factors are not dismissed but they are set against the inability of African economies to cope with major external shocks because of the usual array of mismanagement, corruption and domestic policy errors. With many of the solutions stressing 'capacity building' it is clear that the approach is that of conventional institutional economics. Given this, however, the book does provide a very useful gathering together of recent views on macroeconomic stabilisation and growth (Ibrahim Elbadawi), trade and industrial policy (Sanjaya Lall and Frances Stewart), agricultural transformation (Christopher Delgado), state capacity and effective governance (Deborah Brautigam), the politics of economic renewal (Gyimah-Boadi and van de Walle).

The flavour is caught by the contribution on agriculture which debates the respective roles of supply response and (local) demand in opening up non-tradeables to the market, with an emphasis, inter alia, on a number of transaction costs. There is a recognition that there may be unequal distributional consequences, but this is not given any extended class-based analysis. For economists and non-economists this is quite a readable overview of current conventional thinking – two of the authors are based in the African Economics Research Consortium in Nairobi, four are at Oxford and the rest in the United States. We are given little bio-pics but no index.


Unlike many collections which emerge from conference proceedings this volume manages to combine brevity with substance. The chapters come from the core 'theoretical' contributions to the conference on 'Ethnicity, identity and national-
ism in South Africa: Past, present, future’ held at Rhodes University in April 1993. It is remarkable that despite what one of the contributors (Comaroff) refers to as ‘the banality of theory in conceptual discussions of ethnicity and nationalism’ there is so much to say from so many different viewpoints, ranging from the linguistic through social anthropology to the political. This makes this still relatively short (200 pp) book difficult to summarise, but a few of the chapter headings provide some indication of the range and diversity: varieties of ethnic politics and ethnicity discourse (Pieterse); universalism, particularism and the question of identity (Laclau); hegemony, power and languages of contention (Roseberry); ethnogenesis and ethnic mobilisation (Sharp); and the nation state in crisis and the rise of ethnonationalism (Tambiah).

A useful introduction by Edwin Wilmsen puts the problem of primordialism into context before showing how each of the contributors, in their different ways, reveal ethnicity to be ‘a constituted phenomenon’. Although the conference from which the book emerged was held in South Africa at a time when ethnic tensions were high the contents are not country specific; this is predominantly a theoretical book with examples drawn from a wide range of ethnic and national situations. It should certainly be in libraries, on bookshelves and reading lists.

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Covering the period roughly from the 1930s to the early 1960s this book compares British and French colonial attitudes and policies towards the formal employment sector in French West Africa and throughout the Anglophone colonies. Early debates on forced versus free labour lead on to periods of industrial labour disputes during the 1940s, to relationships between labour and the colonial state, analysis of the French Code du Travail, the incorporation of unions in the approach to independence and what the author calls ‘the ambivalence of responsible trade unionism after colonial rule’. It is an extremely well researched book, with almost two hundred pages of references following the four hundred pages of text. Comparisons and contrasts between countries and across colonial boundaries are well structured. The emphasis is largely on institutional and political history rather than on the economics, or even the political economy, of labour markets and has a tendency to analyse the ‘colonial’ viewpoint rather than offer a ‘workers’ history. There are comparatively few references by name to African workers’ leaders; South Africa in particular is poorly covered, though there is a wealth of analysis and information on West Africa, Kenya and the Copperbelt. There is little concern with gender. On the other hand this is an eminently scholarly book, drawing on a wide range of resources from many former African colonies which stimulates thought on the similarities and differences in colonial labour policies across the continent.

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Yet another substantial volume on structural adjustment! In these days of intellectual property rights if the IMF had followed its own precepts and patented the use of the terms ‘adjustment’ and
‘structural’ it would by now have accumulated enough royalties from academics and their publishers to make a significant donation to the reduction of ‘Third World’ debt. This volume, however, provides one of the most useful summaries, discussions and comparative analysis of the effects of adjustment policies, covering a period in which the single major influence on policy in many countries has come from this source. It simply cannot be ignored in any debate on the period.

The book is divided into two parts. In Part One the background to adjustment is explained and explored, with a summary of its effects on key aspects of development in sub-Saharan Africa – on agriculture, industry, the informal sector, social services, poverty and equity, and gender. The final chapter in this Part points to the limited effects on growth, to being pushed in the wrong direction, and to problems of sequencing; though it also stresses the importance of distinguishing between deficiencies caused by adjustment and those that can be argued to have been caused by failure to implement the adjustment package. An important next step, however, is ‘to halt the donor inflicted undermining of national capacity’. The major portion of the book is taken up by Part Two which provides a substantial analysis of the impact of adjustment on five countries: Burkina Faso, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe, with a comprehensive chapter on each. The opportunity to compare experiences between such countries in depth within the covers of a single volume is extremely valuable and does not render the exercise irrelevant to the many other African countries which have had to wear similar policy straightjackets. This is a valuable exercise in summary and analysis.


There are so few books on the Somali economy, for any period, that it seems churlish to grumble at a new title, especially one that covers the Barre period, and the early 1990s.

Yet this study, written by a Somali economist who has been a consultant to the World Bank, presents us with a banker’s view of the economy, from which it is possible to learn relatively little. We are offered a lot on the failings of ‘socialism’ under Siad Barre, especially ‘socialism’ seen as an overgrown and expensive public sector; and we learn something of the failure of reforms (due, of course, to half-hearted implementation), and the damage done by policy (and policy reversal) to export performance, and private investment.

An all too familiar tune, though it does result in one unfamiliar comment: that after the collapse of the Somali state and the advent of warlordism, ‘the market is more efficient than it had ever been under Barre’s government’ (p. 149)

What we don’t learn much about is agriculture, pastoralism, poverty (rural or urban), food and famine, land (and land expropriation under Barre): the economy as seen by producers.

There is also no discussion of the role of US military or other forms of aid, nor more than a passing reference to the impact of UN/US spending on the economy (and the warlords) after 1992. Although the book is written in part to show that public policy under Barre led to economic decline and thus in part to the outbreak of war, the lessons that are drawn have nothing to say about reconstruction, and treat the war and state
collapse as an episode after which normal life will resume. Maybe that is how the World Bank sees war, pestilence and famine.

Books Received


Malley, Robert, The Call From Algeria: Third worldism revolution and the turn to Islam, University of California Press.1996. 0-520-20301-1. $18.00


Waller, David, Rwanda, Which way now? Oxfam (UK and Ireland) 1996. 0 85598 354 X £5.95.


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Boutrais, Jean, *Hautes Terres D’Elevage Au Cameroun,* Orstom Editions. 1996. 2-7099-1302-X.


**Bulletin Board**

**Conference: Identity & Conflict in Africa**

15-17 September 1997, Bodington Hall, University of Leeds, UK.

**Topics include:** Conflict & Identity; International Politics; Identity & Regional Conflicts; Gendered Identities; Pan-Africanism & the African Diaspora; Economic Crisis & Conflict; Cultural Identity & Expression: Literary & Performance Forms; The Politics of ‘Nation Building’; democratisation & federalism; Religious Identity; Identity & Regional Networks.

**Contact:** Kate Banham, African Studies Unit, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT; telephone: 44 + (0)113 + 233-5069; e-mail: African-Studies@leeds.ac.uk.