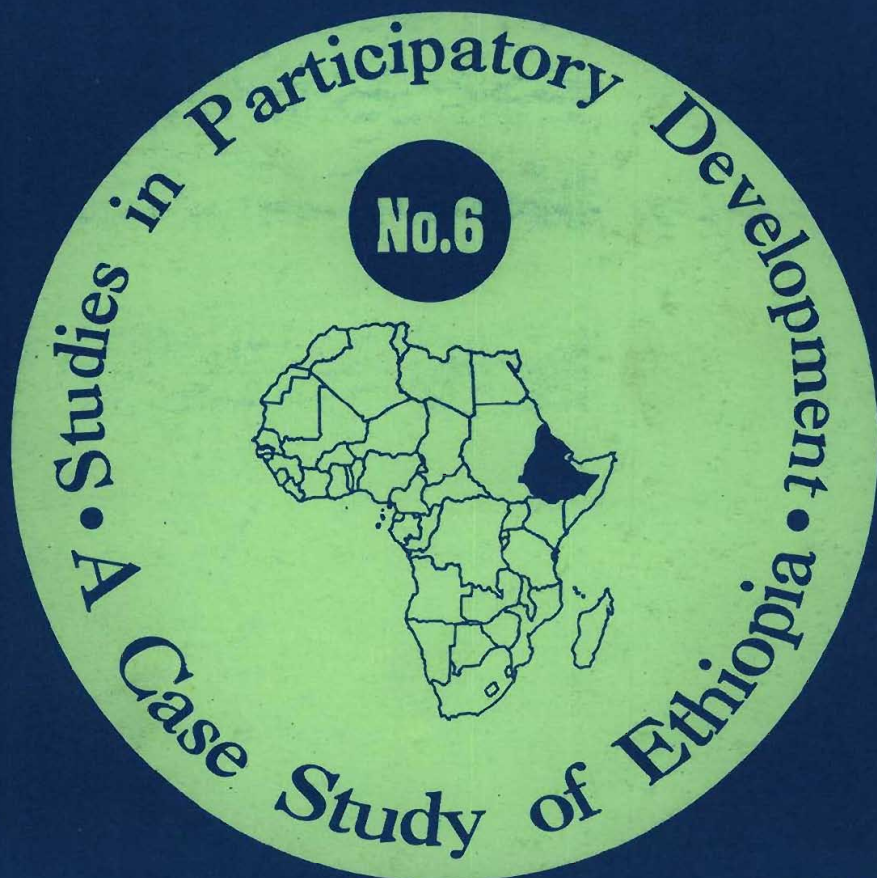


ASSESSMENT OF POPULAR PARTICIPATION  
IN THE FORMULATION AND  
IMPLEMENTATION OF  
DEVELOPMENT POLICIES  
AND PROGRAMMES



United Nations Economic Commission for Africa  
Public Administration, Human Resources and  
Social Development Division



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**STUDIES IN PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT**  
**No. 6**

**ASSESSMENT OF POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN  
THE FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF  
DEVELOPMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES**

**A CASE STUDY OF ETHIOPIA**



United Nations Economic Commission for Africa  
Public Administration, Human Resources  
and Social Development Division

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## Preface

In the wake of the end of thirty years of civil war, a historic moment ripe with challenges and opportunities has emerged in Ethiopia. It is a challenge, because, for a third time in a generation, Ethiopia is faced with the daunting task of building new and equitable relationships; and hence the litmus test to people's ability to participate in reshaping the future of a nation. It is also an opportunity for Ethiopians to marshal their experience and knowledge to play a constructive role in national development.

Spurred by the political space that has opened up in the past two years, a growing number of people's organisations and advocacy groups are springing up all over the country. Not only are their programmes reaching across communities, helping mobilise an otherwise untapped human and material resource base but they are becoming increasingly influential actors and alternative channels for development assistance. The requisite commitment to participate in development — to ending poverty and promoting human dignity has never been more opportune and feasible.

To ensure that the studies remain useful, relevant and topical, suggestions of appropriate subjects for inclusion in the series as well contributions for publication under the series are actively encouraged and sought from our readers. Comments and feed-back on any of the studies published under the series will also be highly appreciated. Please address correspondence on these and related matters to:

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## I NGOS IN ETHIOPIA: WHO AND WHAT ARE THEY?

In Ethiopia there are about 180 various kinds of NGOs, registered within the rubric of relief and development, that are engaged in different activities ranging from offering relief services to that of enabling self-reliant development. There are also over 1000 people's organisations that are registered under the Ethiopian Civil code. Any analysis of NGOs activities, therefore, requires a working categorisation. In this particular paper, NGOs have been categorized based on their objectives, status and origin. NGOs could have single or multiple objective(s) depending on the scope of their activities.

Broadly, NGOs major objectives in Ethiopia can possibly be divided into two main categories, namely: welfare and development NGOs. There are also NGOs that are involved in the provision of relief and rehabilitation services. Although they provide these services, they are increasingly attempting to involve themselves in participative and sustainable ways of poverty alleviation. Welfare NGOs constitute about 72% of the NGOs in Ethiopia.

Relief NGOs, are engaged in providing relief services such as nutrition, clothing, shelter, primary health care, education, transportation and water supply. Most of these NGOs has been functioning since the 1974 and 84/85 famine. The major area of emphasis has been the drought affected and war devastated areas of Ethiopia. Moreover; relief NGOs also provide spiritual services and reunification of dismembered families. There are also NGOs that are involved in rehabilitating war and drought victims. For instance, they provide farmers with draught oxen, seeds, fertilizers and other farming tools. Unlike relief NGOs, rehabilitation NGOs focus mainly on soil conservation and afforestation activities. They play an intermediary role between relief and development NGOs.

Development NGOs account for about 22% of NGOs and are mostly involved in agriculture, reconstruction, advocacy and literacy campaigns. Development NGOs operating in the agricultural sector cover areas such as irrigation, fisheries, dairy



farming, handicraft, bee-keeping and horticulture. In the construction sectors, they are involved in dam construction, electricity, tracing and water resources development.

These NGOs usually concentrate on building the community's self-help capability and to enable them to decide on their own development priorities as well as ways of generating their own income. Advocacy services is provided by some developmental NGOs focused on issues like environmental protection and observance of the rights of people. Vocational training and adult education are also included.

Status categorisation is based on the NGOs degree of intervention at the field level, namely: operational and non-operational NGOs, national NGOs and international NGOs.

Operational NGOs are those NGOs that are operating at the field level and usually participate in distributing relief supplies and engaged in actual development work. They constitute about 60% of the total NGOs, out of which 83% of them are international NGOs. Non-operational NGOs are those that do not directly operate at the field level and are primarily involved in funding and coordinating activities.

National NGOs are established by the indigenous non-government organizations and they constitute about 20% of which 50% are engaged in operational works and 33% of them function at the non-operative status levels.

International NGOs are NGOs based in the north but operate in the south. In Ethiopia these NGOs constitute about 80% of the total NGOs of which 62% are working at the operational level and 34% are of non-operational status.

**Source of Support:** Both national and international NGOs get their support mainly from private individuals and organizations, bilateral and multilateral agencies, Government funds, membership fees and from self-supporting incomes.

**The Institutional Framework:** NGOs active in relief and rehabilitation work in co-operation with the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) while those in rural development are coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), and NGOs in the health field are monitored by the Ministry of Health (MOH). Several NGOs involved in the relief/rehabilitation, education, advocacy and other sectors have also recently began to work with the Ministry of External Economic Cooperation (MEEC).

**The National/International NGO interface:** We always talk of indigenous NGOs and international NGOs as a modern concept that is represented by its governmental counterpart — the North/South economic axis. We also talk of international NGOs and imply that they are outsiders to the communities they aim to serve. This dichotomy is a dangerous diversion as it will torpedo the global mission that world NGOs have come to represent: to fight against poverty, environmental degradation, rights of indigenous peoples, human rights and democracy. NGOs have a special kind of commonality— for all of them represent the downtrodden and vulnerable, both in the rich and poor nations. One can also ask who is the genuinely indigenous among the so called 'indigenous' NGOs. The reality remains that they are most at best comprador NGOs — that critically, and even dangerously hang on the good will and generosity of Northern NGOs for their survival.

On the other hand, it can not also be claimed these NGOs represent the cultural base of endogeneity, kinship and bond that we see in traditional community groups across the country. Village help committees, associations with important religious and social functions and friendship fora that have managed socio-economic development in a way that was sustainable for over 3000 years of recorded history. It is indubitably true that indigenous groups [represented by 'MAHBER', 'EDER' etc.] can rally people behind their own common causes — political, social and economic without support or assistance from any outside sources.



## **The National Consortia**

On the National level, as of 1991 there are three umbrella organizations of NGOs in Ethiopia. These agencies are the Christian Relief and Development Agency (CRDA) the International Coordinating Committee of the Urban NGOs (ICC) and the Council of Ethiopian Humanitarian Organization (CEVO). The first, despite its name, is a non-religious organization concerned with the promotion of greater unity and better understanding among member NGOs who work in rural areas. This was formed in 1975, after the heavily publicized famine of Wollo. ICC is responsible for NGO co-ordination in urban areas especially in Addis Ababa. A third and more important one which has recently formed is — the Council of Ethiopian Humanitarian Organizations (CEVO). This is an umbrella body for Ethiopian indigenous NGOs that are fast asserting themselves in the Ethiopian political, economic and social development scene.

The formation of the CEVO has been predicated on the grounds that this is the most fortunate time to fulfil the historical mission of spurring the growth of civil society in Ethiopia. According to CEVO nothing in this world that requires the interference of NGOs is non-political and therefore needs to be addressed from that vantage point of view. CEVO's mission, among others is to focus on advocacy of issues for the protection of indigenous peoples who might be bull-dozed by a 'democratic majority'; as well as advocacy for sustainable development.

It is CEVO's assertion that one of the classical problems of international NGOs is that they are dominated by factions that have short-lived relief agenda far divorced from the longer term motivational, organizational and material needs of the Ethiopian people. The commitment that international NGOs can have to local populations, in the true sense of camaraderie and kinship will always remain suspect by indigenous groups who have seen only frustration and despair in their efforts to rally the people



behind causes that would empower them on the road to self reliance.

### **Third Generation NGOs: The Challenges Yet to Come**

NGOs have played crucial roles in massive relief operations, assistance in rehabilitations and long-term development with due respect for indigenous knowledge system, environmental consciousness, areas where most governments have disappointing records. They target their assistance to the poor and vulnerable creating the truly empowering environment for peoples participation. Their relationships with communities are not dominated by material resources. This gives them room for flexibility and responsiveness in their work. They work better with traditional institutions and trusted by them.

They achieve outcomes at less cost and their ability and preparedness to experiment with unorthodox ideas and practices, patience, and better capability to articulate rural reality gives them the competitive edge.

Today, indigenous institutions have also started to assert themselves amid the chaos created by the collapse of autocracy and militarism — leaving behind legends of abysmal cruelty of the supreme titans who silenced the fervour for popular governance with the weight of undisputed and unchallenged authority. At this point in Ethiopia's history, NGOs have a decisive role to play in promoting pluralism, an effective counter-weight to the power of the state, that will guarantee sustainable peace as a security to the partnership of the people vis-a-vis powers of governance. Three key issues emerge as a prerequisite for such a process to take place — rootedness, endogyny, empowerment and the emergence of a strong civil society.

NGOs have not only used the relief and development funds to assist communities in relief and development but also for their institution building. This probably explains why NGOs

were so keen at keeping their activities steadily growing over the years. The continuous flow of funds for preparedness, relief and development has allowed NGOs to maintain corporate presence in many of their constituencies. The continued presence of the NGOs has made it possible for the people to evolve their needs thus giving them the necessary respite to adjust their attitude to the relief/development continuum. This can be seen clearly as gauged in our discussions with various communities.

The corporate developmental strategic experiences of Ethiopian grass roots groups has been repeatedly assailed as being tarnished with the exemplary lack of professionalism and the vivid absence of enterprising leadership. While perfection can not be attained in these complex areas of institutional development; the propensity of donors to disempower indigenous groups through such games is potentially damaging.

Today, institutions of development research, agencies of development and the donor community are reaching consensus that governments by themselves have failed to mobilise resources towards decreasing people's vulnerability to famines and destitution. It is increasingly acknowledged that any future development effort must be based on the evolution of political culture based on African traditions and that accords the indigenous people's and community based organizations a substantial expanded role; a strategy which implies the need for greater decentralisation. It is becoming increasingly apparent that future progress depends on negotiating a trend toward greater institutional pluralism and broad based participation in the mobilisation and management of development resources.

Today in Ethiopia hundreds of legally recognised people's organisations are engaged in various kinds of activities ranging from offering advocacy and relief services to that of enabling self-reliant development, scientific and technological work. These traditional organisations are not registered with the RRC or MEEC. They just exist as civil association registered under the Ethiopian Civil Code.



People's organisations that are involved in the provision of relief and rehabilitation services are increasingly taking the initiative to adopt participatory and sustainable way of poverty alleviation. There are some telling stories about these agencies. The Gurage Road Association, is an example, of a peoples organisation that has been raising millions to undertake public work programmes. In Agame, airports, roads, schools and hospitals have been built by community organisations that represent civil society in more legitimate ways. And more importantly the association is rooted in the community, operate with very little outside help and are led by traditonal community.

## **II IMPEDIMENTS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE NGO SECTOR IN ETHIOPIA**

People's organisations face many limitations in the sphere of institutional development. Various recommendations and declarations aimed at addressing people's organisations institutional problems have been made in recent years. Mobilising the required action has, however, remained a daunting challenge, as many practical and structural constraints militate against commitment by individual groups to inter-organisational initiatives, either nationally or regionally.

Among the factors that impede the development of strong and viable NGO community in Ethiopia are:-

1. **Over-Dependence on External Finance and Assistance:** The competition among African People's organisations for external funds greatly erodes their capacity and commitment to mobilise collaborative action and achieve consensus around issues of common interest for their autonomous development. Questions have been raised as to whether Ethiopia's local groups have so far been effective in generating resources

locally and depending less on outside sources. It is also argued that people's organisations and NGO do not show sufficient interest in becoming self-reliant and prefer to tap into the relatively easy resources of donors. This in turn has damaged the credibility of these organizations as genuine indigenous entities and has led to the impression that they are merely agents of donors.

2. **Lack of Consensus on National Issues:** Although they have a lot to contribute in their advocacy roles, NGOs have been unable to establish a clear and coherent voice nationally on issues which are crucial to their work, or to the interest of the local communities they serve. While many people's and community based organisations proposals for remedial action have been formulated, real commitment to collaborative processes at the inter-organisational level has always been limited.
3. **High Priority on External Links:** Closely linked with this is the tendency of voluntary sector groups in the region to place a high priority on their external links. This external focus undermines local organisations legitimate mission as co-actors in the struggle of communities for self-empowerment.
4. **Networking:** The absence of effective networks which speak for them, coordinate their relations, represent their interests and advocate their position on important national issues, has hindered their ability to make collective demands on some important issues. On a programmatic level, an effective, well coordinated body would have allowed them to undertake certain tasks which are beyond the financial and technical



abilities of individual NGOs. Individually many NGOs grapple with similar issues of institutional development and operational efficiency. But because of lack of information sharing, they cannot learn from each other's experiences or be motivated and encouraged by the work of others in similar circumstances.

5. **Lack of Focus:** One of the problems which characterises indigenous People's organisations is the lack of programmatic focus and the tendency to go from one sectoral project to another depending on available funding. Also, once the external support for any project is exhausted the people's organisations take up whatever activities the donors are funding. The inability to specialise in a particular area of competence renders organisational learning irrelevant and makes continuity of a particular agenda and goals impossible.
6. **Institutional Weakness:** Moreover, as a sectoral interest group, they remain institutionally weak. This fact compromises the potential for sustainability in their programmes. The external pressures which often characterise their search for project funds are partly a result of their institutional incoherence, and their limited capacity for advocacy.
7. **Absence of Professionalism:** A lot of NGOs invariably lack institutional memories and, hence, the reflective capacity and absence of professionalism in their work and the ability to take stock of where they are going, what they have learned and what lessons can be passed on to others. Therefore, although some projects accumulate a large body of data, the information

has often been used for informing funding agencies or to be presented in a report rather than to critically and systematically appraise the work of the organisations.

8. **The relief development nexus:** Most NGOs start out as relief agencies and move to development because they have to, without any institutional or professional base to do the work.
9. **NGO Logistics:** One wonders whether the NGO sector in Ethiopia has turned into a logistics organisations under Dergue's Socialism. True there was a need for logistic buildup at that time as the transport facilities in the country were totally owned by a government that gave little priority to the transport of relief and development programmes. Today this has resulted in a serious problem. As they say 'the tolls of the mind become burdens when the environment that created them no longer exists'. The Ethiopian NGO sector has had a mental preparedness not to trust the Dergue. This attitude seems to prevail today and many NGOS in the name of 'institutional development' are acquiring more vehicles thus turning themselves into trucking organisations other than development agencies. For example, the relief and development staff are outnumbered by a heavy margin by drivers, driver assistants, transport clerks and technicians. At the end of the day it is the person who manages these trucks and land-cruisers that has the say in the agency rather than the development personnel.

A closely related issue is the concept of subsidised Government and NGO strategic fleet that are in direct competition with the private



sector and which the government is trying hard to encourage as part of the drive to rehabilitate the Ethiopian Economy. Ironically, the number of land-cruisers seem to be increasing by the day. The cost of a land cruiser today is equivalent to the annual projects inputs of a PA in one of the most successful NGO area-based rural development projects.

There are also other structural limits to people's participation in their organizations and the development process.

Among these major limits are:

- These might be imposed by such factors as the poverty level to which individuals and communities belong. For the very poor are often precluded from participation because they are preoccupied with searching for food from day to day, others are precluded because of illiteracy, physical handicap, inadequate clothing for public appearance at formal gatherings, lack of social and political 'connections' and cultural traditions such as those that discriminate against women's participation in public meetings and affairs. The first point to note when considering the question of dialogue between governments and various civic institutions including people's and community based organisations is the acknowledgement of these very basic limitations.
- More than that, there are limitations against popular participation and dialogue with governments imposed by the technical

nature of the issues at stake. At a slightly higher level many people's and community based organisations and even churches or other religious groups, simply do not have the technical capacity to engage in serious dialogue with governments on issues which require a highly technical and complex arguments to arrive at meaningful solutions. Many of these might be classified as 'macro-issues' such as debt-servicing, international trade and bilateral agreements, fiscal and economic policy issues.

- NGOs and people's organisations have yet to demonstrate capacity to master the technical skills to meaningfully engage in dialogue with governments on these issues. Beyond platitudes and good intentions many civil institutions cannot participate in dialogue with governments because they lack the personnel with requisite skills and facilities to inform their arguments or present credible data to support their assertions.
- Far more critical in determining both the level and quality of dialogue between governments and civil society is the political and economic context in which the agencies find themselves. The context for dialogue, cooperation and interface between African governments and people's and community based organisations has so far been determined to a large extent by the rules and wishes of the international donor community.



The attitude of the international donor community aside from formal rhetoric is that the African states, today are solely responsible for the current sorry condition of the continent. Increasingly, therefore, the conditionalities of foreign aid have aimed at limiting the operational scope of the state. States have been steadily losing their formerly unchallenged status as intermediaries between local social forces and dominant economic and political powers on the international scene. The international donor community now distrusts the African states and are unwittingly chipping away at their institutional credibility and capacity, thereby denying it the partnership role it should play in national development. This places special responsibility upon the NGOs who have become alternative channels of development and humanitarian assistance.

### **III GOVERNMENT — NGO RELATIONS**

In the past, single-party states neither tolerated nor recognised any other centres of power within society apart from the party and government which had become almost synonymous. NGOs and other civic institutions were tolerated only as long as they adhered to the State's definition of development or existed to provide alternative conduits of foreign aid. The fact that NGOs used the cover of welfare to empower people has, however, resulted in the relation between states and civil society institutions to be characterised by invasion of civic space by the state and its structures.

Indigenous organisations can rally people behind their own common causes — political, social and economic. As such

they already present a substantial challenge to the government who liaise with them with extreme caution especially given the growing conviction that they are a component of a cohesive, purpose oriented, social and organisational people's base. Some People's organisations are looked upon in many countries as 'anti-government organisations' since they address the causes of the destitute and usually play advocacy role against the profligacies of governments.

When over-centralised governance was finally seen for what it is — undemocratic, corrupt, and a complete failure in poverty alleviation — the donors signalled their change of heart by diverting increasingly larger sums of development aid from governments and channelling it through people's organisations. Donors' demands for greater democratic governance and popular participation have further transformed the relations between governments and organised civic institutions. The problem now is where to locate the legal basis of such new relations between government and civic society?

The relations between voluntary agencies and government have to be situated within an overall analysis of their roles. In the early days right after the 1984 great African famine, governments became interested in the NGO movement and began to take them seriously. In some countries the contribution of the sector reached to more than 50% of foreign earning including ODA. International NGOs and peoples organisations in the form of humanitarian action groups, cooperatives and village help committees flourished; some with genuine interest in civil society empowerment, others under the guise of socialist development.

The main issue in government-NGO/people's organisation is whether or not the state has the capacity and the will to relate to voluntary agencies on the basis of mutual respect, autonomy, equality and trust. The relationship between people's organisation and state is characterised by positions of unequal



power, making it very tempting for the state to dictate conditions and terms of relationships.

The real problem is when the states have to figure out how to relate advocacy of people's organisations which are engaged in championing environmental issues, consciousness raising on the root causes of their problems and institutional development among the indigenous communities. In several countries the relationship has not been smooth sailing. In the past, the institutional strife between the two actors was quite visible, at times assuming national dimensions.

The policies of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, as ratified, endorsed, or in preparation, provide the legal and policy framework within which civil society empowerment is exercised. The TGE has adopted a number of political and economic policies. The macro-policies that are immediately relevant to this analysis are: The Charter of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia; The National/Regional Self-Governments Establishment, Proclamation No. 7/1992; The Definition of Powers and Duties of the Central and Regional Executive Organs of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, Proclamation No. 41/93; A Proclamation to Define the Sharing of Revenue Between the Central Government and the National/Regional Self Governments, Proclamation No. 33/1992; and Ethiopia's Economic Policy During the Transitional Period. A number of basic themes and principles are embodied in the macro level policies: regionalization, decentralisation, participation, nationalism, and reduction of the role of the state in the economy.

The regionalization/decentralisation policies have been followed by swift implementation whereas the economic policy prescribes a phased implementation approach. For the purposes of community participation, the implications of the political decentralisation and the economic liberalisation differ in terms of immediacy. The divergences of decentralisation are that the Government departments and NGOs will and must

operate through a system where authority is vested at a variety of levels. The divergences of participation are that decision making is to be largely bottom-up, from the individual and the community through the decentralised executive organs.

Phased decentralisation of development structure and operations is not an option, as the powers and authorities have already been legally delegated. Congruence between institutional capacity and operational empowerment on the one hand and political-level empowerment (already achieved) on the other hand is required.

The divergences of the transitional economic policy are equally important, although these will be manifest in a more gradual way. Transitional Government formulated a new economic policy for the transition period; in which the role of the state in the economic development process is envisaged to be redirected and reduced while that of the private sector is to be increased without any capital limitation. The role of the state is to be confined to charting out overall development strategy and formulation of economic policy; participation in projects which the private sector is not prepared or unable to carry out; and to create enabling conditions for the private sector expansion. While the participation of the private sector in the development process of the country is essential, certain conditions prevailing in the country make the state still a necessary actor in the economic management of the economy.

Creating an enabling environment for the private sector, the state must ensure an unrestricted entry into any economic activity; guarantee assured access to inputs and markets; provide fiscal incentives, make available adequate and efficient infrastructure and other supportive government services; and technological assistance. Critical sectors such as human resource development, environmental conservation programmes, energy and communications, for economic as much as social reasons need to be undertaken by the state. Again as the private sector in its infancy, NGOs will have to play a crucial role



in providing employment and human resource development. The implication of all these changes to the NGO community is that it would call upon to fill the service gap that would be left by the state. As the states role is reduced, NGOs will be called upon to provide some of the essential services.

Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) which have been agreed upon with the Bretton Woods institutions seem to have correlated only to the adjustment of exchange rates; which are substantially emasculated to deal with the internecine problem of *franco valuta* and counter trade. Structural adjustment is supposed to result in macro-economics prudence mainly characterised by *inter alia* downsizing government, exchange rate adjustment to informal market levels, and incentivating the private sector and exports and improving the balance of payments.

Certain measures such as demobilisation, the foreign exchange auction, the legalisation of retail trade and cottage industries, the increased independence of public enterprises, the divestiture of state farms to regions and cooperatives, the redeployment of civil servants to regions, limited retrenchment, and the transformation of public corporation that specialised in harassing the poor and other measures, such as privatisation, the reduction of the role of state enterprises in wholesale trade, and fiscal policy reform are pending. All these imply that the NGO sector is going to become important both as sources of services and finance in many of the development endeavours.

The structural adjustment and social dimensions of adjustment (SDA) implications of the economic policy are recognised. The stabilisation and adjustment processes mean that the public sector (including the public enterprises) will lose employees relative to the private sector. However, loss of employment in the public sector will not be followed immediately by a new job in a private company. In addition, the new jobs will require skills that the existing labour force does not possess. Thus, people will encounter difficulty in gaining new employment.

This relative immobility of the majority of people across economic sectors during the adjustment period is expected to increase vulnerability, including generalised vulnerability to disasters.

The impact of price increases at the consumer level will impact hardest on the poor in urban areas and in rural areas. These two factors argue for special consideration of the SDA issue in Ethiopia. However, the issue is not dealt with explicitly in the Economic Policy or in the Policy Framework Paper. Depending on circumstances, SDA activities (measures to reduce the burden of adjustment on the "new poor") are managed under a stand-alone programme, or are folded into sectoral/relief activities. No formal SDA programme has been adopted in Ethiopia.

It is within this macro-policy framework that sectoral policies and strategies have been and are presently being drafted, endorsed and ratified. Both legally and operationally all sector strategies must take these major policy tenets into full consideration. The challenges are how to manage the transition in the decentralised, participatory environment as the economy adjusts from high to reduced state participation. The opportunities are for more involvement of NGOs in effective and efficient management of the transitional period in Ethiopia.

The policy is neutral on the question of whether or not NGOs are desired partners in development. The lack of a clear policy statement provides insufficient guidance to other line departments and decentralised administrations on under what circumstances NGOs should be operating. It also results in confusion in the NGO community if they are desired to have a direct relationship with line departments other than RRC (for development activities).

It is recognised that NGOs have a valuable contribution to make to development. It is also recognised that given their diversity and their ability to shift from relief to development, as



circumstances change, makes it difficult to categorise NGOs neatly. A policy on NGOs needs to be formulated taking these issues into consideration and to empower the NGO community to continue its work, in accordance with established government policy, in Ethiopia.

**National Policy on Women:** The National Policy on Women is a statement of basic principles prescribing the scale and scope of women's rights to equality in every aspect of life in Ethiopia. Women's full involvement in the development process at the strategy, policy, planning, programmes, project and implementation levels is mandated. Increased participation leads to an increased share of the benefits of development, which in turn leads to a reduction in the overall level of vulnerability of women to *inter alia* disasters.

The policy posits that women are the first victims of natural and man-made disasters due to their high (in relation to men) vulnerability. This position is supported by numerous analyses showing that *inter alia* women are left at home in times of drought when the men migrate in search of employment; women are, by their socio-economic status, denied the possibility to relocate in times of difficulty; women have the responsibility to raise and feed their children (further precluding movement); and, women are bereft of the skills necessary to secure stable sources of non-subsistence income.

The policy prescribes special treatment for the needs of women in the development process, which is summarised as "full participation." The policy does not give a specific definition of "full participation." The lack of a formal definition means that full participation is, in practice, to be defined situationally. The policy on women encourages many of the women's group a larger segment of the traditional associations in the country to become more visible and prominent in the development process of the country.

### **The National Population Policy of Ethiopia (NPPE):**

The NPPE describes the rationale for population programmes in Ethiopia, and prescribes organisational mechanisms in the government for its implementation. It contains (as strategies) a mixture of programme interventions, new laws, studies and recommendations to other line ministries and NGOs on the incorporation of gender and population issues into their programmes and institutions. The programmes prescribed by the strategy are (broadly) promotion-related, service delivery-related and method availability-related.

On every level, the success of the country in meeting the objectives of the population policy (reduction of the total fertility rate with the attendant reduction in the population growth rate) is central to the success of the country's recovery and growth plan. If the goals of the population policy are not met, the population will exceed the carrying capacity of the environment and of the economy. The results will be increased chronic vulnerability and vulnerability to disasters. And as NGOs are the only groups currently dealing with family planning, the success of the initiative is going to be based entirely on them.

The NPPE lacks an action plan for implementation other than to depend on the extensive NGO network service. Between the policy statement and the programme level interventions, an action plan to guide implementation at the programme level is required. This plan should deal with questions such as resource requirements, timetable for implementation, and policy issues such as social marketing vs free distribution. The absence of an action plan for implementation will likely hinder effectiveness at the programme and output levels with the attendant impact on goal achievement.

**The food and Nutrition Strategy:** The strategy recognises that NGOs have indicated their desire to continue their support with long-term development schemes. It recommends that clear procedures be established to allow the



signing of NGO project agreements directly with the relevant government institutions. The issues surrounding NGO participation in development and relief/rehabilitation activities are complex, and a policy proposal is in the informal discussion phase within the government. The specific recommendation contained in the NFNS will be considered in the on-going policy-formulation process.

**Enhancing Government NGO Relations:** People's organisations are assuming increasingly important roles as agents of democratic expression and citizen innovation contributing to the search for more just, sustainable, and inclusive approaches to national development. It is important and timely that governmental policies and regulations relating to their formation and function be re-examined and revised within the framework of universally accepted human rights principles.

These guidelines should be applied in the relations of governments and those civil institutions involved in service delivery, community development, advocacy and civic education. It is clear from these guidelines that people's and community based organisations should be expected to exercise self-regulation and that the freedoms and rights of People's organisations go with the responsibilities of good behaviour and proper conduct of their business within the law. National NGO councils, would be the formal point of contact between the government and the people's and community based organisations. Alternatively, a representative council of elected people's and community based organisations' leaders and government officials representing different ministries could be constituted as the formal point of contact and interface between the government and the sector.

It should be carefully stressed that each people's and community based organisations must have the right before the law, to represent its interest and defend itself or seek redress in a court of law. A formal point of contact between government and people's organisations can, however, serve also as forum

for information exchange (especially important for People's organisations and people's and community based organisations to access technical information more readily available to government).

Both governments and people's organisations must realise that they are two sides of the same coin and that to the extent that they are able to maintain healthy relationships, they will be better set to cope with the changing priorities of donors — the one dominant external force that is shaping the future of African states.

In their requirement of technical assistance or other input of a specialised nature, NGOs must prioritize the use of locally available expert resources, with recourse to outside technical assistance occurring only after exhaustive but unsuccessful efforts to use national or regional expertise.

Ethiopian NGOs must at all times seek local mediation channels for inter-organisational or personality conflicts arising in the course of their work. While they must as a duty call upon the world to know evil doings of NGOs working in their region, they must totally refrain from disseminating rumours, information and news capable of bringing disrepute and disrespect to the NGO sector.

In order to safeguard their sector's credibility with its partners within and outside the country, and command greater respect for the cause of self-reliance, NGOs must work to attain increased institutional efficiency and clarity in designing managing and determining the course of their operations. In particular, NGOs must demonstrate a practical commitment to prudence, modesty and honesty.

CRDA and CEVO must compile and disseminate a comprehensive register of persons, institutions and other sources of relevant expertise across a wide range of development sectors and issues in the country and develop their



own technical assistance capacity to be able to assist in locally mobilising needed technical input on behalf of their members as and when required. As part of their advocacy responsibility, CEVO and CRDA should initiate a dialogue with a view to address the issue of unbalanced and sometimes demeaning representation of development realities in Ethiopia.

In addition to their other important functions, national people's and community based organisations consortia must carry out regular advocacy activities on behalf of their members. National consortia must undertake the task of promoting the people's and community based organisations sector as a channel for supplementing official development efforts, and not as an antagonist or competitor with the government. To do that, they must engage in advocacy and dialogue with relevant national authorities to secure people's and community based organisations access to the national media. Such access will be vital for publicising the sector's contribution to national development and promoting its image as a useful development partner of government.

It is expected that inter-people's and community based organisations will utilize the formal and informal channels of communication and will play a major role in highlighting cases of Government/people's organisation which fail to deliver their promises.

A channel specifically advised for monitoring observance are the reports of people's organisations. It will also be useful to promote observance of the code by making periodic evaluations of how the NGOs are contributing to the goal of self reliance.

#### **IV DONOR — NGO RELATIONS**

Self reliance cannot be stressed more in a world that is coining phrases like "donor fatigue" — where it has become almost impossible for the international community to act as a fire

brigade to the recurrent problems Africa is facing — drought, floods, pests, epidemics and pandemics, industrial disasters, international wars, internal conflicts and a colossal debt — the combined effects of which have slumped the continent into the abyss of misery and an even more daunting future.

The primary task of all NGOs that claim an indigenous base, even if they are branches of the international system, is to declare their national identity without which they will be voted out as intruders. At their formation, NGOs must clearly set out in their constitutions and other background documents, the immediate and medium term development objectives of their organisations. The statement must be precise about the reasons for their formation: in particular, they must present in everyday language how they have defined the problems and concerns that led to their formation.

In relevant operational and background documents, NGOs must state precisely their commitment to participation at the grassroots or community-level, taking trouble to mention some of the areas in which their intended work would increase self-reliance, including how it could be done in particular, mobilisation of local-level thrift potentials. In their internal operations, NGOs must endeavour to promote participation and, as much as possible establish a democratic process for in-house decision-making on programmes and projects.

It is important to note that external funds are indeed a useful part of the development process; but they are not the most critical aspect of people-led, people-centred development. It is people who determine whether to undertake 'development' in the first place. Therefore, Ethiopian NGOs must actively support and mobilise all collaborative efforts possible for the establishment of an NGO Capital Fund. With increasing realisation that current piecemeal and ad-hoc fund-raising exercises alone cannot ensure the sector's long-term capacity for financial self-reliance, it is incumbent upon NGOs to make vigorous efforts to secure, as soon as possible, a strong



financial base to match the increased role they will play in the nation's development.

One of the key advantages of a capital fund will be its use in assisting new groups to establish themselves and begin operating on their own terms before any contact with external funders. Such funds can also help finance NGO activities or initiatives of strategic nature, which although do not have immediate tangible outputs, are very crucial to the long-term institutional and sectoral development of NGOs. Moreover, donors are generally reluctant to back such initiatives.

## V CONCLUSION

The Ethiopian Government must pro-actively reinforce people's organisations' contribution to the region's development process by creating an enabling environment for voluntary sector initiatives to thrive, so that they can effectively supplement official development programmes.

People's organisations should assure governments of their sincerity of purpose as contributors to national development and that they will not work against the interest of their people and of their countries. They should be committed to supplementing the development efforts through socio-political empowerment of grassroots populations.

The common goal should be reiterated over and again — improved quality of life for the most vulnerable and deprived people and communities in our countries. We believe that a participatory and democratic approach is best for achieving that goal in a sustainable way.

Governments should show willingness to open up their national media to the people's and community based organisations, so that they can use them to disseminate adequate information on their work, and as a channel for enabling local communities to share useful experiences on how

their daily work contributes to improvements in their livelihood conditions and to national development.

Peace is crucial for a people-centred development. In view of this, there is a call on African Governments to promote the evolution of a pluralistic society — a necessary condition for development. When the creative energies of civil society are released in a democratic environment, substantial 'peace dividends' will no doubt be available to society at large.

We surely need the benefits to be derived from avoiding internal conflicts and instability. The prevalence of peace and freedom will amount to non-quantifiable but crucially necessary resources for reinforcing the pace of development of the region. Finally, the Governments must grant tax, import-duty and other essential concessions required to facilitate the voluntary sector's contribution to the region's development. It is noted that multinational interests, whose ultimate objective is to export funds and resources from our countries, sometimes enjoy these concessions.



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