

Re-Conceptionalizing the Evolving Issues of NGO-African State Relations

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ABSTRACT: *After tracking the evolution of NGO - African state relations from the pre- independence period through transitions to multi-party democracies. I argue that (currently) service delivery NGOs within in each state can coordinate with state officials in ways that will result in win-win outcomes. Politically active/civic NGOs offer greater challenges for the twenty-first century.*

KEY WORDS: Non Governmental Organization, Civic Organizations, Democratization, Service Delivery, Social Origins Theory

Non governmental Organizations play a critical role in mediating state - society relations on any continent. In Africa, the roles of non governmental organizations and NGO-State relations can be understood, in part, through analyzing the periodization of NGO-state and external funding relations that evolved or declined due to political, economic, or natural phenomena.

This paper identifies the evolution of NGO-State and external party relations and examines the roots of what is often an adversarial relationship between African states and the non governmental organizations within their borders. In response to the subtitle of our collective project, "Building Consensus and Setting Priorities to Resolve the African Development Crisis," we can, armed with an understanding of the evolving relations among states, NGOs, and external donors, offer strategies for effective NGO-African state relations. Specifically, the thesis of this paper is that State leaders must understand that the nature of NGOs varies greatly, just as regime types/state administrations vary greatly, and that alternative practices between States and NGOs can and should be formulated in order to achieve productive relations. There is no one set of relations that can be applied across the spectrum of NGOs and State formations. However, we can demonstrate that collaboration by state and service delivery NGOs is a win-win situation for states, NGOs and also for their African communities. Additionally, foreign donors or International NGO partners (INGOs) must own up to the challenges to the state that their support for civic or politically active NGOs foster. They cannot simply

support African adversarial NGOs and not simultaneously engage state officials about their response to that sector. The challenge of the next decade will be for African state leaders and donors, along with their political or civic NGO leaders, to organize productive relations that benefit local African populations.

The sections of the paper are as follows. First, I analyze the changing NGO-State formations over time beginning in the pre-colonial period until the recent democratic transition period. Then, I identify the underlying adversarial concerns of state and NGO leaders that work to prevent effective policies that can benefit African citizens. Third, I argue for varying policy strategies by States and NGOs depending on the nature of the work performed by the NGO. Fourth, I argue for international partners of African political/civic NGOs to be more pro-active about the results of their actions on the Africans with whom they work.

I. PERIODIZING AFRICAN STATE-NGO RELATIONS

A. African Non Governmental Organizations in the Pre Colonial And Colonial Eras: From Self- Help Societies To Professional And Political Organizing

Prior to the establishment of colonial boundaries, when African traditional political formations could be found throughout Africa, two NGO-like associations existed: self help disaster societies and burial societies. (Jenkins 1994; Tripp 1994) These organizations functioned as local community organizations that provided a social safety net for Africans trying to cope with disaster and death. These associations linked Africans beyond the family compound to their friends and neighbors and to their clan members.

During the Colonial Period when foreigners controlled the state apparatus, Africans organized themselves into non governmental organizations to

- secure representation in the labor sector through labor unions,
- assert control over their own trading activities through trade associations,
- associate through religious/church organizations
- promote skills acquisitions and secure jobs through professional associations
- create independence movements
- create political parties to contest for state power, as political parties became a forum acceptable to the occupying powers in the final years of colonial rule

Often, it was the leaders of African non governmental organizations in the form of professional associations or trade union activists who went on to found independence movements that organized Africans to challenge the

colonial state's control of its African territory. Likewise, leaders of professional associations and trade union activists often were responsible for founding political parties as a way to position themselves as legitimate claimants to state power in the eyes of the colonial regimes.

As can be seen by the above discussion, during the colonial period, many African non governmental organizations were oppositional organizations to the (colonial) state. Once Africans achieved independence, therefore, many new African leaders believed that the need for such organizations no longer existed as it was the ambition of newly independent state leaders to provide services and political voice for the African population. Additionally, many African leaders of the (colonial period) NGOs were absorbed into the independent state eliminating the effective leadership of the organizations.

B. The Post-Colonial Independent State: Disbanding Civic Action Non Governmental Organizations and Binding Civil Society to the State

Africa's new ruling parties preferred party mobilization of state affiliated organizations such as women's organizations, youth associations, and labor movements to independent non governmental organizations. Citizen associating was thought to be best achieved through state-led organizations. The new state leaders believed that "state building" should be top priorities for Africa's newly independent states. The leadership of many colonial organizations such as trade unions or independence movements as well as transitional political parties was brought into the bureaucratic apparatus of new African states. National unity and state support and engagement was demanded of all citizens as the new state leaders argued that with scarce resources, and the need to build state capacity, all attention should be focused on and given to the state, not to competing independent organizations.

For the most part, independent organizations retained legitimacy in only one arena. Religious organizations and brotherhoods, and church related organizations were not pressured to come under the state's umbrella uniformly across the continent. For example, in some West African states, religious brotherhoods were tied to political parties and often constituted by social networks with links to the state. In Southern African states, however, most church groups retired from politics following the achievement of independence.

In return for demanding unity and loyalty from its citizens, African state leaders believed that they could provide for the welfare of Africans who had secured few resources with which to live due to the restrictions that had been placed on African educational and occupational options during the colonial period. Moreover, Africa's newly independent citizens had high expectations concerning the state's ability to secure resources and direct those resources toward the improvement and enrichment of its black African citizens.

During the post-independence period, the ruling parties in most African states came to believe that even competing political parties had to be proscribed. Likewise, non governmental organizations in the political and civic action realms were effectively banned.

Yet, during the 1960s and 1970s, non governmental organizations were constituted in the service delivery arena as it became increasingly clear that despite its intentions, the African state lacked the capacity to effectively deliver basic services needed by its historically disadvantaged citizenry. Additionally, in the early 1970s, the threat of natural disaster demanded an organized response for African citizens. As government service capabilities were limited, the early 1970s saw NGOs able to work effectively to relieve citizens faced with drought, or locusts, or flooding.

During this period, International Non Governmental Organizations (INGOs) found local partner NGOs with whom to work to offer relief services. In many areas, these INGOS and their local partners replaced churches and missionaries as the organizations in the community to whom citizens looked when faced with difficult times.

C. The 1970s: The Legitimization of NGOs, And the Growth of Service Delivery Non Governmental Organizations

Certainly African states were dominant in the social formations of African countries during the early 1970s. Most African states had created parastatal organizations and most African states intervened in state and local markets in numerous ways. Thus, most African states could not be characterized as "liberal." However, in Africa, in contrast to the situation in the West, most of the NGO sector did not respond in number or activities according to levels of state spending, but rather to levels of external INGO and other foreign donor spending, whether this additional spending was by foreign governments, foundations, or multilateral organizations. Most studies, that focus on Western state-ngo relations demonstrate that when the state spends and provides for services, there is little room left for ngos. When the state does not provide, NGOs fill the gap. The same is true for Africa, except there is a third stakeholder in this dynamic. Out-of-country funding of NGOs is required in Africa as few Africans accrued resources during the colonial period due to the restrictive colonial economic laws for Africans.

It also is important to consider another phenomenon that was occurring in the early 1970s. The legitimacy of international not-for-profit organizations as reliable international actors was expanding. The United Nations provides a clear example of this trend. As can be seen in the history of the United Nations, from its own beginnings it was coupled with associative

International Non Governmental Organizations such as the International Labor Organization (ILO). The ILO had been founded after the First World War but was affiliated with the United Nations when it was launched after the Second World War. Thus, labor unions based in many advanced capitalist countries that worked closely with the ILO had a voice in international affairs through the ILO's activities vis à vis the United Nations throughout the post World War II period. The United Nation's charter also granted consultative status to NGOs operating alongside the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

But the early 1970s saw a quantum leap in NGO legitimacy and in the activities that they carried out in tandem with the United Nations. At the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, Sweden, a Concurrent NGO Forum was conducted alongside the official forum that housed official representatives from member states of the United Nations. The Concurrent NGO Forum created a precedent for future United Nations conventions. Non Governmental Organizations were seen as legitimate participants in debating and providing information concerning contentious international issues.

When the International United Nations Conference on Women was held three years later in Mexico City (in 1975), unofficial participants and NGO leaders and members once again created a parallel forum to consider the topics of debate and negotiation. Never again would NGO leaders or activists believe that only official state representatives could reserve the right to debate policy at international forums.

In the mid-1970s, the United Nations undertook one other initiative that contributed to the legitimation of international NGOs. During 1975 and 1976, the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Services (headquartered in Geneva and New York) initiated outreach and coordination with Non Governmental Organizations on a multitude of issues. Coordinating UN activities with those of partner NGOs furthered the legitimation process of NGOs and INGOs in international affairs.

In the 1970s, individual Northern governments also took actions that seemed to confirm that NGOs were viewed as credible partners in both relief agency and development work. In 1973, for example, USAID altered its funding to provide multi-three year contracts for NGOs in developing countries. This new multi-year contracting helped to provide financial security and stability for the work NGOs undertook. It also signaled that NGOs were credible partners and would have staying power.

While the United Nations was convening legitimacy on international NGOs through its consultation and coordination efforts, international NGOs began to take steps on their own to create activities outside of state agencies and

outside of and multi-state institutions. For example, Amnesty International was founded in 1961 in the United Kingdom. During the 1970s, Amnesty International expanded internationally and exponentially, creating non governmental organizations in many states around the world. Likewise, Médecins sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders), was founded in 1971 and the Non Governmental Organization, Human Rights Watch, which was founded as Helsinki Watch in 1978 following the 1973-75 Helsinki Conference, expanded into new countries. These new International Non Governmental Organizations evolved to allow the participation of nationals from various countries.

In Africa, as noted above, during the 1970s, NGOs proliferated with the help of new found legitimacy and new found revenue sources. Also during the 1970s, African state capacity diminished as the oil shocks of 1973 and later 1979 skewed national budgets and undermined African exports. African states were caught in what economists have described as a “scissors effect.” Precisely at a time when energy costs were high and caused the prices of goods made in industrial countries to rise, African states earned less foreign exchange to pay for their increasingly expensive imports. This was because the high cost of energy raised the price of goods produced internationally and thus sales slowed as consumers saw their discretionary incomes dwindle and Northern businesses searched for ways to cut budgets including salaries and work positions. Fewer purchases were made and this left inventories on the shelves of producers in the advanced industrial countries which, in turn, undercut the demand for African exports of raw materials to be used in producing goods in the Northern states.

Without earning export taxes and with a poorly functioning domestic tax on its citizens who were facing the ripple effects of a sluggish global economy manipulated by the Arab Oil Exporting States, African states had to borrow to cover energy costs, payroll costs, and to offer state services. African debt mounted.

Other contributing factors to African debt no doubt included expanding military budgets, ever expanding bureaucracies, and the need to import food during repeated droughts throughout the 1980s.

While African state mismanagement and corruption undoubtedly took a toll on African economies, international events such as the oil shocks at the beginning and end of the 1970s also took their toll. Additionally, little new investment was initiated during this period as few business entrepreneurs could function in what U.S. President James Carter termed an international “economic malaise.” African states themselves could not revive their economies as they lacked the technology, work force skills, and market openings to find areas in which to compete in a shrinking international political economy.

As the African state became more obviously incapable of leading development, even international financial organizations began making including NGOs in their programs. Between 1975 and 1982 six hundred and fifty private voluntary organizations/non governmental organizations were involved in 100 Bank-financed projects. (Smith 1990)

D. The 1980s: NGOs Filling the Gaps, the Creation of Umbrella NGOs, NGO-State Rivalries, and the Integration of African NGO Chapters Internationally

By the 1980s, the African state was viewed skeptically by external donors, Western diplomats, and African citizens across the continent. For foreigners who spoke of aid fatigue and the need to not support inefficient and often corrupt African leaders, abandoning African citizens, when there was such clear need among historically disadvantaged communities, was not an option. Thus, African non governmental organizations provided an alternative to supporting inefficient and/or corrupt, African state leaders and their single-party, non-diversified economies.

There was an irony to this approach. On the one hand, donors were fatigued with “project development” approaches to national development and endorsed IMF national structural adjustment programs. On the other hand, donors began shifting funds from state agencies to NGO project initiatives.

This occurred in part, because along with foreign donors’ desires to fund alternative development programs outside of state programs, in the 1980s, non governmental organizations around the world advanced claims that their organizations carried the seeds of democracy and better represented average African citizens than did African state elites who occupied formal state administrative offices. We will return to these claims in Section II.

The 1980s saw the rise of intermediary NGOs or umbrella NGOs across Africa; these intermediary organizations grew out of three primary factors. First, beginning in the 1980s, African NGOs realized that they could find sources of financial support from external governments and donors, but that they suffered from an inability to claim these resources as different sources of donor funding required different forms to be filed in application for funding, and also required different record keeping mechanisms if funding was forthcoming. Also, during this time, African NGOs were hard pressed to employ many staffers and thus had little time and limited skills to devote to preparing the paperwork necessary when seeking funds. Further, because international donors came from many countries, funding applications had to be prepared in many foreign languages.

Intermediary or umbrella NGOs arose partly in response to this need for some point person or agency to negotiate between local NGOs and foreign donors and mediate the range of rules operating in a given African country. In this instance, umbrella NGOs assisted smaller local NGOs when approaching foreign funders. Moreover, when a foreign funder sought a partner in an African state, they could receive assistance in partnering from an umbrella NGO.

A second contributing factor for the rise of intermediary or umbrella NGOs came from the needs of local NGOs to compare notes on project initiatives in various arenas in which they operated. Such a need was also acknowledged internationally. In 1986, for example, the UN Programme of Action for African Economic Recovery and Development (UNPAAERD) was adopted at an UNGA Special Session. It urged expanded cooperation among United Nations agencies with Northern NGOs and with African NGOs.

Finally, intermediary or umbrella NGOs arose to coordinate local NGO activities vis à vis the African state. As revenue streams from foreign donors to African NGOs increased, states became increasingly interested in how to regulate their NGOs and recapture some of those revenue streams. NGOs needed to band together to represent their interests to the state. Umbrella organizations in some African states were able to assist with this task.

This same need to band together took place where local African NGOs that were not externally funded hoped that collective action would advance the interests of those working in a given sector. This can be seen when market stall owners or other occupationally clustered citizens formed professional associations through which to negotiate with an African state. Or it can be seen, for example, when makers of crafts tried to set licensing and quality guidelines for those who produced objects for purchase by tourists or for their national elites. These self monitoring, self regulating associations also functioned to represent their members interests to the outside world.

In some African states, umbrella organizations took the organizational form of federated organizations and networking associations, such as the enduring religious brotherhoods in West Africa.

Several phenomena in the mid 1980s through the early 1990s complicated these processes. First, the externally negotiated Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) caused Northern donors to seek out local NGOs with whom they could partner in the absence of a fully staffed state agency or a state that lacked administrative capacity. With SAPs came obligations to cut national budgets which translated into cuts in social service spending as well as the dismissal of thousands of state bureaucrats who performed services for their African citizenry.

During this period of SAP budget cutting and state withdrawal from citizen's affairs, NGOs were left the task of trying to "fill in the gaps" for African citizens while the state tried to salvage itself from bankruptcy. This tracks with one view of the "social origins" of the growth of NGOs in the North that holds that where states are less involved in providing social safety nets and spending on citizen activities, NGOs will fill in the gaps. (Anheier and Salamon 1999). In Africa, in the 1980s, where African states lacked capacity and resources, external financing and the role of NGOs shifted. In 1982, external Non Governmental Organizations transferred to Africa about \$0.8 billion dollars. By 1989 they were transferring 1.4 billion dollars to Africa equal to more than half of all private financial flows to Africa in that same year. (*Africa Recovery* Sept. 1991)

As African NGOs continued to secure outside funding, the NGOs were increasingly seen as an employment alternative to the state by urban Africans seeking white collar employment. No longer was the African state seen as the sole or primary route to financial employment and success.

A proliferation of African NGOs began in the 1980s. This proliferation included the creation of some NGOs by unscrupulous founders who promised donors more than they delivered and used their NGO leader status as a vehicle for self enrichment and access to foreign exchange, rather than as a vehicle by which to provide Africans with services that the state could no longer provide. However, most NGOs were viewed as legitimate partners by their Northern counterparts. For example, the World Bank which had focused on NGOs involvement in its programs since the mid 1970s, in 1983 established a joint committee of NGOs/PVOs.

During the 1980s, those communities living under apartheid states also offered persuasive reasons for funneling money to local NGOs rather than through state institutions. Historically disadvantaged communities in Namibia and South Africa received funding for NGO activities as few Northern donors wanted to be associated with, or were prevented legally from funding, apartheid racist states.

The second phenomenon that occurred for a substantial number, though certainly not the majority, of NGOs during the 1980s is the collapse of the distinction between some Northern NGOs and their African partners. During this period, a number of Northern NGOs created Southern chapters rather than attempting to coordinate with independent African NGOs. Amnesty International is an example of an international organization creating African chapters which have the same voting rights at international meetings as any other chapter and have the same limitations and or range of independence to undertake domestic action. Or using another model, Oxfam creates local Oxfam projects run by and for local African communities. From the point of view of such foreign NGOs, this allowed decisions and money to be

employed by locals and cut the costs of funding Northern experts who traveled to Africa. It also created a situation in which local citizens would make decisions in their community that they determined were best for them.

E. The Implosion of the Soviet Union and the Privileging of Civil Society; The 1990s and the Building South-South Linkages among African Non Governmental Organizations

A third phenomenon that had an enormous impact on African state-NGO relations during the last years of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s was the implosion of the Soviet Union. Two observations followed from the demise of the Soviet Union. First, the United States and its Western Allies no longer needed to tolerate authoritarian governments simply because they were anti-Soviet states. Second, Civil Society actors and popular protests were major contributing forces to the democratic transitions in Eastern Europe and Latin America. Together these two observations led many policy makers in Northern states to believe that financial and political support to civil society organizations in African states would help in the political democratization and economic liberalization movements on that continent.

Democratizing and liberalizing states around the world became a concern of U.S. policymakers and those from other Northern states because of their belief in two principles: 1) that democratic states rarely go to war with one another, and 2) that free market capitalism provides the best mechanism for advancing economic development within a given state and among states. In the 1990s, during his second term in office, U.S. President Bill Clinton would make these two principles the pillars of the Clinton foreign policy doctrine, commonly referred to as “engagement and enlargement.” The efforts of U.S. foreign policy makers under Clinton were to engage non market states and assist them to liberalize their economies which, in turn, it was argued, would socialize the elites of these transitioning states into the community of nations and move them on the road to joining, and thereby enlarging, the community of democratic nations globally.

Additionally, during this period following the implosion of the Soviet Union which carries into the 1990s, efforts to build mutually supportive linkages among Southern states were increased. These initiatives were promoted for two major reasons. One, as noted above, if the goal of Northern states was to expand free trade areas and liberalize economies within African states, it was more efficient to accomplish this through regional free trade pacts and the harmonization of liberalization programs in adjacent states than to try to work with each state individually. South-South cooperation, which was seen in the late 1970s and early 1980s as a vehicle for resisting Northern hegemony, was now employed by the North as a means by which to regionally transform Southern states in ways that Northern states believed would create benefits

for both the North and the South. Aid programs were also affected. In the 1990s, for example, Canadian Aid was given preferentially to those non governmental organizations that were collaborating with other non governmental organizations across state lines and throughout their regions.

From the point of view of African states, with the implosion of the Soviet Union, there was no longer a credible alternative model of economic development to capitalism. If a state resisted moves to join the community of capitalist trading nations and their neighbors did not and then attracted foreign investment, then the state that had resisted would be left behind. Most African states continued to require foreign investment due to the low prices they received for their unrefined and agricultural exports. They had little to invest themselves in their own development. Efforts to liberalize African states were not matched by efforts to liberalize Northern states in the areas of agricultural or mineral trading. Given their trade profile, most African states lacked the ability to finance their own development investments. Capital mainly had to come from outside.

As the growing private sector in African states sought foreign investors, foreign donors did not entirely trust funneling money to the African state which was still in the process of creating transparent practices and a rule of law that treated all citizens as equals and did not lose efficiency through corruption and other market distorting activities. The arguments advanced by African and other NGOs in developing regions persuaded many foreign donors that service delivery was accomplished better, or at least as well, by neighborhood and localized NGOs as it was by governments. Moreover, having witnessed the power and democratization efforts of civil societies in toppling authoritarian regimes around the world, building strong civil society institutions such as local non governmental organizations was viewed as a bulwark against a return to authoritarian states. Such efforts had been proceeding since the 1980s when high conditionality structural adjustment programs were being introduced in Africa. In the 1990s, donors would continue to expand their efforts. Now, their actions to bypass states and build civil society institutions such as non governmental organizations were supported by an explosion of research on the links between civil society and democratization.

Resurrecting, Alexis De Toqueville and his writing on the role that civil voluntary associations in the United States played in creating habits of discussion, compromise, and civic trust, modern researchers examined his hypotheses and sought to analyze his findings in light of current events. Robert Putnam et al, for example, completed a monumental study of the roots of Italian democratic and fascist traditions. Putnam and his co-authors found that in Northern Italy, where civil institutions such guilds existed, these civic organizations socialized citizens to learn the processes of negotiation, bargaining, compromise, and trust over time, and consequently democracy

flourished and was defended when threatened. In Southern Italy where hierarchical authoritarian practices of agriculture persisted, fascism was attractive to the local citizenry.

Putnam's later research on the United States concerning its social turn toward individual activities and accomplishments further influenced policy makers in their notions of civil society and its link to democracy. Putnam analyzed the impact of computers and an emphasis on private sporting achievements as opposed to young people joining teams and engaging in voluntary community activities. He raised concerns about the habits of democracy among younger generations of Americans. But the underlying point was that engagement in civic organizations builds trust and the ability to converse and compromise and move on to new problem solving endeavors. Even as Putnam worried about the endurance of these activities in the United States as he argued that they form the bases for thriving democracies, policy makers were utilizing his research to commit themselves to building civil society activities in late industrializing states.

F. The Twenty-First Century and African NGOs

As the twenty-first century dawned, optimism for multi-lateral cooperation and NGO-State relations continued. There was a new emphasis among donors on not only service delivery but also on governance and transparency and "nation building." Following in the intellectual trends of Putnam and other writers, Northern states, especially states of the European Union as well as the United States, believed that by supporting local civic organizations and Non Governmental Organizational forums, democratic processes could be rooted in areas where formerly single party states reigned. But African states had become suspicious of NGOs even as many NGOs believed that associating with government officials somehow tainted them.

II. ADVERSARIAL CONCERNS OF NGO AND STATE LEADERS THAT UNDERCUT EFFECTIVE POLICY COLLABORATION TO THE DETRIMENT OF AFRICAN CITIZENS

As African NGOs continue to receive external dollars and as newly democratizing African states argue that they need revenues to effectively govern, hostility between these institutions is unsurprising. In the twenty-first century each institution has been making its case for receiving foreign donor dollars and for taking responsibility for service delivery in various sectors of a country's political economy. Below, I itemize major arguments made by NGO leaders as to why they should receive external and internal funding and be allowed by the state to administer services in various sectors.

A. African NGO Leaders Argue that They Should Receive Foreign Funding Largely for Reasons of Effectiveness and Democratic Practices.

African NGOs generally site the following reasons when making their case as recipients of foreign funding:

- ▶ Democracy is not developed from the top down; NGOs bring grassroots perspectives-effectively involve populations in the decision-making process
- ▶ NGOs provide important feed-back information for proposed policy initiatives-producing better policies
- ▶ NGOs achieve more effective outreach into communities
- ▶ NGOs achieve more efficient use of funds
- ▶ NGOs create lasting democratic traditions/empowerment
- ▶ NGOs can make governments look good/better-enhance legitimacy

Source: Strategic Research Inc. *Workbook 1. NGO-State Relations* 2004.
(WWW.StrategicResearchInc.Org)

According to these claims, NGOs bring a community-based approach to decision making that allows for better policy planning as well as feed-back loops to modify programs when necessary. NGOs lack the bureaucracy of the state and use funds more efficiently as they are flexible and more dollars go to projects not administration. Many NGOs claim to be more democratic than states in that they respond to the stated needs of their local constituencies.

B. African States Argue that NGOs Overstate their abilities and Undermine the Development of State Capacity on a Continent where Building State Capacity Should be a Priority.

African states generally site the following reasons when making their case as recipients of foreign funding:

- ▶ Governments need to build state capacity to gain legitimacy
- ▶ Scarce resource competition
- ▶ NGOs not democratic, who elected you? -consultation does not mean decision powers
- ▶ NGO finances not always/necessarily transparent
- ▶ Competing NGO perspectives - competing perspectives in civil society; it is up to government to balance and decide
- ▶ Ngos have limited ability to coordinate across sectors and across geographical boundaries-localized projects will not spur national development
- ▶ NGOs, like all citizen organizations, must be accountable to the state

Source: Strategic Research Inc. *Workbook 1. NGO-State Relations* 2004.
(WWW.StrategicResearchInc.Org)

Governments note that NGO claims to be democratic are often unsubstantiated. No one elected NGOs to lead them. Often, NGO Directors are local tyrants, not democrats. NGOs are not always transparent. Sometimes NGOs are taking funds that should go to the public and harboring those funds in overseas bank accounts owned NGO directors. Other NGOs, “briefcase NGOs” as they are called appear in order to claim resources but don’t always deliver the promised product.

Additionally, Government officials will often claim that NGOs are often specialized and have little capacity to coordinate across sectors in ways that will effectively address complex social problems and projects.

Finally, NGOs do not always agree with one another and thus, ultimately, it is government that must sort out the lines of responsibility and authority in various sectors for NGOs.

In the twenty-first century we have seen a rise of state activities in democratically transitioning states (some transitioning very slowly) that seek to “manage” their NGOs through registration, regulation, and intimidation.

III. State Leaders Must Recognize that Not All NGOs and NGO Leaders are the Same and that State Leaders Must Collaborate with Honest, Productive NGOs Because Such Collaboration Will Aid the State.

State leaders particularly fear NGO leaders who are anti-state or allied with opposition parties. This is unsurprising especially among authoritarian state leaders. However, not all NGOs are active in the political realm.

It is the contention of this paper, that all state leaders can benefit from NGO activities if they ally and coordinate with service delivery NGOs.

For all the reasons noted above in this paper, foreign donors are likely to continue to finance service delivery NGOs. NGO leaders want to conduct their work without harassment. State leaders want legitimacy and the wherewithal to service their citizens.

A win-win situation for both NGOs and State officials exists when an NGO is funded (usually externally) and can work with state counterparts to promote local communities. This requires that 1) NGOs are free to conduct their business and 2) that State officials be given credit along with the NGO staff for serving a community’s needs. The critical key to this occurring successfully is the effective use of publicity. Citizens want services. If state-

NGO collaboration is what it takes to deliver their services they will respond affirmatively to such collaboration.

For states to achieve and maintain legitimacy, it is in their interests to meet as many of their citizens' needs as is possible. Collaborating with NGOs is a win-win situation for states as well as for NGOs who seek the opportunity to provide services.

A concerted effort at publicity and communication of successful collaboration will secure for the state much credit for NGO activity. The "trust-building activities" of collaboration and the publication of the achievement of common goals through local programs will enable the state to learn to trust particular NGOs with whom it collaborates.

In turn, over zealous regulatory state activities towards NGOs can be relaxed when it is realized that NGOs that can operate freely and coordinate with the state and reflect well on the state as collaboration helps to improve local African communities, a goal that surely benefits both states and NGOs.

Sadly, few African states and NGOs collaborate well or use the communication resources at their disposal to advertise trust building collaborative activities that have positive results. A policy prescription for the twenty-first century, then, is that such collaboration and publicity should become priorities for state officials in sectors where effective NGOs operate.

IV. The Challenge of the Next Decade is for NGO International Partners, African state leaders, and Politically Active NGOs to Formulate Rules of Engagement that Benefit African Populations.

A particularly thorny, yet rarely acknowledged problem when foreign donors support NGOs is that donors hope that NGOs affect the political context of a given state, and not merely provide service delivery activities to a local citizenry. The European Union, the United States, and other Northern donors are quite explicit in their belief that civil society is expected to democratize a state from the bottom up and that such NGOs are to safeguard human rights and the rule of law.

In Africa states, democracy is once again being challenged as ruling political parties find ways to maintain their power while claiming to be democratic. The idea of civil society democratizing the state and guarding the underpinnings of political democracy is not attractive to state leaders who seek ways to manage and contain political opposition so the current rulers can continue to rule. To such state leaders, NGOs are seen as untrustworthy, anti-state activists.

Northern donors have not yet sufficiently articulated how their support for political NGOs should not be viewed by African states as intervention in the political affairs of African states.

As the evolution of the NGO-African State relations continues, this arena of political activity by NGOs in transitioning African states will be of critical importance. It would be quite possible for African governments to begin to identify and collaborate with service delivery NGOs and continue to ignore or intimidate political or civic NGOs.

In advanced industrial democratic states, political NGOs that are allied with opposition forces to the current government are protected by the rule of law that guarantees such NGOs treatment equal to NGOs that are partisan toward the government. When administrations and political parties replace each other through elections, all NGOs remain protected as long as their opposition and discourse remains lawful.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, most African state leaders are unwilling to embrace such democratic practices. Working out state - NGO interactions in the political realm remains the critical task of evolving African NGO- state relations.

Likewise, international donors must be explicit, principled, and candid regarding their roles as third party actors in such evolving NGO-African State formations. This is the task for the next decade of the twenty-first century.

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