

Making African NGOS more responsive to social needs

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ABSTRACT

The development of institutionalized voluntary sector or the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Africa is a complementary response to the shortfall in public sector provision. But that development was made possible because of the existence of communitarian principles of advocacy, obligation and responsibility, already practised in the extended family before the arrival of the European Christian missions. The success of foreign NGOs is due to the management principles of openness, accountability and non-distributiveness demonstrated in their operations. It is proposed that African NGOs should apply their communitarian principles to these management principles so as to become more responsive to the needs of their people. In this way African NGOs will be able to tap into their local resource base to fund more good causes as well as contributing towards an inclusive and sustainable bottom-up democratic welfare system.

Introduction

DISCUSSIONS CONCERNING THE socioeconomic development of countries often centre on two sectors—the public sector and the private sector. The public sector derives funds for its activities from taxation as well as revenue from natural resources, while the private sector generates its funds through profit-making businesses. In both sectors however, it is the public who contribute to general taxation who also operate profit-

¹ Health in School Project (HISPRO), Nigeria. I would like to acknowledge the constructive comments in the first draft of this paper by an anonymous referee

making businesses. The private sector is not obliged to serve the public interest from its profits. The extent to which the public interest is really served by the public sector is not clear, as the state is not only in the business of protecting public interest but also in protecting the national (state) interest.

For the purpose of this discussion I shall say that the public interest is served when services that benefit the everyday life of members of the public are provided and delivered. This includes educational, health-care and financial services. Partly as a result of the dual role of the state, there is a shortfall in the provision of public services. This shortfall necessitates the development of a third, or voluntary, sector. The voluntary sector generates its own funds through the voluntary donations of individuals and group members of the public. In other words, the voluntary sector exists to complement the public sector.

In developed countries with their efficient application of basic management principles, the voluntary sector, represented by the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), has been very successful in meeting social needs. In fact, the role of the voluntary sector cannot be dissociated from the development achievements of those countries. This role includes providing care for the homeless as well as giving funds for research into diseases like cancer. However, in developing countries (and African countries in particular) the voluntary sector is yet to make a recognizable impact. Where they do make a impact, information about it is scanty. As a World Bank country study in 1993 puts it:

The state of knowledge about NGOs in Uganda is typical for developing countries: we do not know even how many development NGOs exist, much less how many communities they serve, what kinds of activities they engage in, how effective they are and how much non-governmental funding they mobilize (World Bank 1995 3: 22).

But if African NGOs apply the communitarian principles of the extended family system to the management principles that have made foreign non-governmental organizations successful, it is possible they would

also make more impact. As Theodorakis (1998:57) suggests, it is only by re-evaluating experience and tradition that those who aspire to progress can utilize forces that would enable them act effectively.

The development of the institutionalized voluntary sector in Africa

The development of the institutionalized voluntary sector in Africa is the legacy of foreign organizations, especially the European Christian missions (Schram 1971 and Wellard and Copestake 1993). For instance, Ajayi (1965:163) writes that during the colonial period "the most essential feature of the Victorian society, the voluntary association, was also encouraged". Examples of this can be found in the Mutual Aid Society and the Ijaye Relief Committee formed to send aid to Christians and to care for the children evacuated during the Ijaye War between 1860 and 1864.

However, before the arrival of European missions in Africa, voluntary action rooted in the people's communitarian philosophy, formed the basis on which social services were provided. For instance, in the field of traditional (pre-colonial) African education, Fafunwa (1982:15) writes, "responsibility for the upbringing of young Africans is traditionally shared by the entire social group". And Nyerere (1982:236) believes that this kind of education is more directly relevant to the society. Bratton (1989:570) agrees, stating that Africa has a long history of collective (voluntary) action. The communitarian African philosophy espouses an inclusive principle of mutual responsibility whereby members of a society pursue values they hold in common and mutually (Tam 1998:14).

The principle of mutual responsibility is demonstrated in the extended family system. For instance, Bindura-Mutangadura (2001) reports that the main form of support for households coping with incidents of morbidity and mortality in Zimbabwe comes from the extended family. And Chazan et al. (1999) indicate that the extended family, the lineage and, in some cases, the more inclusive clan, define a person's immediate social networks and obligations. According to the authors, "there is rarely a bureaucrat, university lecturer or migrant worker who does not feel the need to meet the expectations of his or her relatives" (ibid.:79-80). It is the principle of advocacy within the extended family system

that provides the key to a group member's recognition of the need to meet another member's expectations. In a given family this can be observed as when, for instance, the mother advises her son to assist his niece. Because such assistance is often socioeconomic in nature, to reciprocate the niece assists her uncle with his domestic chores. The mother feels obliged to do this because the niece is her granddaughter. Thus, by her act of advocacy, a network of mutual relationships is established within an extended family.

This is how the communitarian philosophy provides every member of a network of families an opportunity to contribute what they can towards the development of the extended family. Even at the larger community level, the chiefs or a committee of the various family heads that govern that community also performed the act of advocacy. For example, when the people of Bonny, a municipal town in Nigeria, wanted an entrepreneurial education rather than a religious one, it was the chiefs who spoke to the missionaries on behalf of their people to secure what they wanted (Lewis 1965:32).

Moreover, the principle of mutual responsibility ensures that the suffering or happiness of one member is shared among the other members of the family. And because of the institutional nature of the family within society, mutual responsibility can also be said to be institutionalized. In such groups individuals receive welfare support from others, not as a favour, but as a right (Bratton 1989:570). But a claim to such rights among members of a social group also imposes a burden of obligation on the part of those to whom the claim is made. As a result we can identify these communitarian principles of responsibility, advocacy and obligation.

It is these principles that have sustained the extended family system and have enabled the institutionalization of the voluntary sector in Africa. This is particularly so because, as Ajayi indicates, in the extended family system where beneficiaries are members of the same family networks, the immediate beneficiaries of the missions' philanthropy were also those in close contact with the missions.

Proliferation of NGO activities in Africa

Since after Independence there has been an influx of foreign aid organizations as well as proliferation of local NGOs in Africa. Hiscock (1995:30), for instance, observes that in 1993 Ghana received financial support from over 175 NGOs for its health activities alone. In Nigeria during the 1998 World AIDS day there were more than ten indigenous NGOs in the field of AIDS advocacy. Giving a reason for this development Amanor et. al. (1993) describe how in post-colonial Ghana, "a vacuum in welfare provision for the urban and rural poor led to a growth in NGO activity from the late 1960s" (ibid.:183).

Despite this rise in NGO activity the demand for welfare provision still outstripped the supply. But that vacuum was due to the aloofness of the state during colonial times to public needs. For instance, during the colonial period, health services were provided only to members of the colonial service and their relatives, to the neglect of ordinary members of the public. The Adeola scandal of 1888 in Nigeria (Adeloye, 1977:10) demonstrates this.

Although in recent times the state has not been aloof to public needs, the impact of the global economic downturn of the 1980s has found developing countries turning to NGOs for assistance. Engberg-Pedersen (1996:23) describes how, during the crisis years which preceded adjustment, African countries saw an extension of non-state actors as an option in the provision of social services. This move does not seem to have yielded results. In fact, it was the perennial socioeconomic problems affecting African countries that led to the establishment of the Global Coalition for Africa in 1990 with the aim of developing a long-term approach to such problems. Despite the voluntary sector involvement in the development process, social problems still persist.

In 1995 during a conference organized by the Global Coalition for Africa, Dr Kwesi Botchwey, a one-time Finance Minister in Ghana, observed,

Experience in many places suggests that there are many who are jumping on the NGO bandwagon for reasons that have nothing to

do with development as such. Some promote narrow sectarian interests even as they purport to advance popular aspirations (quoted in Davies 1995).

This kind of experience prompted the World Bank to conduct a study which reported that "in many countries public investment programmes have become passive repositories of donor-driven projects whose recurrent costs after completion continue to accumulate contributing to an expansionary fiscal bias" (World Bank 1997:84). In this report the World Bank indicates that, although turning to NGOs for aid may be due to weak capacity on the part of local officials, the presence of too many aid organizations has led to fragmentation of policy-making.

This fragmentation hampers the ability of the state and indigenous NGOs to respond to social needs. Governments in developing countries and their indigenous NGOs have had to fulfil conditions attached to foreign, NGO-administered aid. Because those conditions were externally derived (in the spirit of "partnership") without reference to local needs, they had little or no relevance to the country concerned and were bound to distort the government's prioritizing of socioeconomic needs. Hence, as Engberg-Pedersen et al. (1996:3) indicate, there was an initial reluctance by leaders of these countries in accepting foreign aid.

A shift from public sector responsibility?

In search of solution and in an effort to deal with its socioeconomic problems, the state in Africa shifted some of its responsibility for public welfare to individuals. This can be seen in policies and programmes where access to public services such as health-care is made to depend on the ability of individuals to pay for those services. The Bamako Initiative demonstrates this very clearly, according to Diskett and Nickson (1991:44). The aim of this initiative was to pass recurrent expenses such as drugs, health workers' salaries and fuel costs on to individual patients. Although individual members of the public may be willing to pay, in most cases they pay for services that are virtually non-existent. Hence in Zimbabwe, according to Bassett et al. (1997:1850), rather than attending hospital consultations when there are no drugs

available, members of the public would prefer to have drugs available in the hospitals and the costs included in their consultation fees. If, despite the involvement of the voluntary sector, individuals are required to pay even more for public services, is it not worth questioning what benefits the proliferation of NGOs has brought to the African people? It would appear that the increase in NGO activity in Africa has created a situation in which the public sector has become less, rather than more, responsive to social needs.

Proliferation of NGOs: a disadvantage from reliance on foreign funding?

Michaud and Murray (1994) suggest that external assistance, which forms only 2.8 per cent of total health expenditure in developing countries, may be altering the policies and priorities of the governments of these countries. Since government policies are expected to reflect the needs of the people, any alteration of policies initially developed on the basis of local needs would also mean that the people are excluded from a process of collective action, including the collective derivation of resources.

Similarly, when local NGOs (e.g. the Christian Relief Development Association in Ethiopia and the Grassroots Health Organization of Nigeria), depend on foreign NGOs to fund much of their activities, the clients are excluded from participating in the development process. In a case study of Sierra Leone and The Gambia, Hudock (1999:59) observes that NGOs rely on external sources of funds to such a degree that their activities are largely donor-driven and reflect outside interests rather than those of grassroots. This dependence can prevent local NGOs from maximizing resources from their public. This is what Fowler et al. (1992:10) mean when they indicate that African NGOs are "uncoupled from their local resource base".

A major problem in the excessive reliance of local organizations on foreign funds is that this limits the ability of the local public to seek accountability. If a whole community's individual NGOs are dependent on external donors, no one in the community has a right to request accountability. But this weakness is because it is more likely for NGO

operators to be accountable when there is a benefactor relationship with property in their trust, than a mere beneficiary relationship. In fact, an indirect benefactor relationship can also exist when a close or distant relative can be identified as a direct benefactor. Meanwhile, where a benefactor relationship exists, those who do or should demand accountability can also influence the security of "their" (public) property either by continued contribution, withdrawal of contribution and support or withdrawal of support for the activities of NGO operators. But where no such relationship exists the community cannot influence the security of NGO property. If they try to do so success is unlikely. For instance, Zaidi (1999:265) indicates that, if NGOs fail, according to criteria adopted by a donor, money can be delayed, reduced or completely halted. In short, the right to accountability is usually held by the donors.

The other problem about dependence on foreign funds is that, although they may be large, they are short-term and for specific projects (Najam, 1996:342). Hence NGO operators spend most of their time in the office on administrative tasks required to maintain northern NGO support, which leaves them little or no time to develop relationships with or respond to the needs identified by the community they serve (Hudock, 1999:9). Njenga (1996) observes that, in reality, the contribution of foreign aid to national development is less satisfactory than anticipated, except for disaster alleviation or relief. According to the author, "apart from a few in the emergency and relief sector most NGOs are moving away from pure service delivery to the area of capacity building and lobbying" (Njenga, 1996:27).

The proliferation of NGOs: an unanticipated accident?

African countries have taken the route of capacity building, rather than service delivery. "Capacity building" is a term that describes the various activities or processes that have the purpose of strengthening, developing or creating social structures, organizations or institutions that fulfil differing roles in the development sector (Thorn 1997). In structure and culture African NGOs are a reflection of their northern counterparts. Their common situations can best be illustrated by considering two cases of apparent NGO proliferation. One is in Britain

where 70 per cent of the public think that there are too many charities doing the same work; cancer charities being a good example (Benjamin 2000). The other is in Lagos (Nigeria) where during the 1998 World AIDS day there were more than ten charities working in the field of AIDS advocacy alone.

When foreign NGOs have been established in response to emergency situations (e.g. Save the Children Fund and OXFAM, founded after the First World War and during the Second World War respectively), they continue to impact on lives of people around the world long after those emergencies. The success of these organizations can be traced to their methods of planning, where appropriate and adequate resources, including information, are secured or have the potential to be secured, before they embark on their missions. Hence, we can see that when disaster strikes there is always a co-ordinated effort by the major or relevant organizations to generate a common reservoir of resources from their home base, which enables them to respond effectively. The flood that hit Mozambique in 2000 is an example.

However, when development, resources and information are lacking or are not properly co-ordinated, there is bound to be duplication of roles by many organizations with similar objectives. And so, if African NGOs continue to multiply in response to emergencies, when they have little resources and limited access to information, their chances of responding effectively to the daily social problems of their people are slim. And if these NGOs continue to depend on foreign support, which often is given in response to emergency situations, hopes for the benefits of development will be dashed as soon as such support ceases to exist.

Competition and mergers

Meanwhile if the proliferation of NGOs is a common feature of development for both developed as well as developing countries, it can only be a coincidence. In developing countries with a small resource base and in the face of limited access to relevant information, there will always be competition among NGOs and it is possible that open competition as, for instance, in the struggle to generate foreign funds, will pitch one NGO against another. Blind competition may also arise

from lack of co-ordinated access of information within a country or region. In either situation competition will undermine, rather than contribute to, development. Ikelegbe (2001 8:22) indicates that the proliferation of civil society activities, in their bid to project and protect "substantive interests" and "parochial goals", are "undermining democratic sustenance and stability". But in developed countries such situations can be repaired because of successful mergers among their NGOs, unlike among African NGOs.

Successful mergers in a developing country are unlikely because NGOs are often built around individual personalities or the self-serving interest of their operators. This personalization makes the proliferation of NGOs unavoidable since individual operators seek to protect what they see as "their own", serving their own purposes, rather than the public interest. For instance, when an operator of a local NGO in Nigeria was asked why she was building new old people's home rather than renovating existing ones, replied, "I cannot use my own money to develop government old people's homes" (*Tell magazine* 2001:38).

Proliferation of NGOs: advantages for development

Even where local capacity development may constitute an advantage, the core function of NGOs, recognized by the World Bank, is service delivery (Munro et al. 1999:87). Service delivery can be carried out within existing facilities or it can be by establishing new facilities. Thus, the more NGOs there are, the more public services should be delivered. But the overriding principle of service delivery, as reflected in how much NGOs perform, should be the serving the public interest. That is how foreign NGOs make their reputations at home.

Despite their growing numbers, foreign NGOs are still able to mobilize additional resources from their public to complement or support the efforts of their governments. In specific cases their contributions even outstrip those efforts of government. In 1999, for example, £10 million worth of neonatal equipment was supplied to hospitals in the UK by charitable organizations. In the same period the government supplied only £2 million worth of neonatal equipment through the National Health

Service (*The Sun* [SW] newspaper, 2000:4). In African countries such figures would be considered extraordinary.

African NGOs depend largely on foreign organizations for their funds. In Ethiopia, for instance, because of incessant drought and war, the Christian Relief Development Association derives 98 per cent of its funds from foreign organizations (Beurden, 1998:57). However, even in Nigeria, with its huge natural and human resources, NGOs still depend on foreign NGO funds for much of their activities. Yet the proliferation of NGOs in Africa should provide an additional opportunities to mobilize local resources, because the more NGOs there are, the more money they could derive from their local public for particular good causes.

Management principles based on trust

The success of foreign NGOs in Africa can be attributed to the management principles they use. First, being able to mobilize large resources is an indication of the trust they receive from their public, which suggests in turn their degree of accountable to that public. Second, as they are able to provide services even in already-existing public facilities, they are open to public scrutiny and not to their own members alone. And third, public trust may depend on how non-distributive their operators are with property entrusted to them.

All this can be summed up in the comment, "the charity sector only functions because of trust" (Benjamin 2000). This shows that African NGOs can and should also become more responsive to their people's social needs. They can do it if they apply the communitarian principles that have sustained the extended family system to these management principles of accountability, openness and non-distributiveness, which have made foreign NGOs successful. Such an application would enable and strengthen the reconnection of African NGOs to its local resource base.

A responsive strategy for African NGOs

In order to build on the principles of the extended family system in Africa, we need to be clear about the value of the system. First, there is

a cohesive advantage coming from mutual responsibility that unites the parties involved in a relationship. Second, this union ensures that the relationship is enduring. Bindura-Mutangadura (2001:18) reports how households in Zimbabwe "have become increasingly dependent on family support" in their times of need. Chazan et al. (1999) also indicate that:

Despite many changes during the colonial period and first year of independence—including a move towards a more nuclear family in the urban areas and the development of inequalities based on education and income within the extended families—kin ties have rarely been consciously severed or kin obligations easily ignored (p. 80).

Although relational ties may not have severed by being uncoupled from their local resource base, African NGOs have failed to provide a connective avenue for the public to demand or be provided with accountability. NGO operators need to involve their local public in a benefactor relationship through which the members of the community served can also claim a share in the ownership of the NGO, thus enhancing their power to demand or expect accountability from NGO operators.

A failure to provide this avenue for accountability limits African NGOs ability to respond proactively to social needs. This is because NGOs are accountable to their external donors or patrons (Najam 1996:351), whose interests they may be serving, rather than their clients. The weakness of African NGOs in responding to social needs may be a result of their failure to apply effective management principles in their operations, as Botchwey suggested, pointing to the need for NGOs to improve their governance (Davies 1995:1914). The following strategy would help to improve their responsiveness to social needs.

Openness in advocacy

Voluntary action is usually taken in response to social needs. It takes place either in family situations or in the larger community. In each setting voluntary action has often been initiated by individuals who

believe in the principles of social justice. In England it took the resolve of people like Lord Ashley, Richard Oastler and Michael Thomas Sadler to sensitize the public to the need to free their people, especially children, from hunger and disease. They did this by embarking on advocacy such as writing articles for newspapers and giving talks and lectures in public. According to Fraser (1984), these advocates were so moved by their people's needs that they were not afraid to call on the slave masters or the community as a whole to "sink your commerce and rise humanity, benevolence and Christianity" (quoted in Fraser, 1984:18). Hudock (1999: 91) believes that southern (including African) NGOs have a comparative advantage in advocacy over their northern counterparts. But this advantage is not always used. Najam (1996:346) believes that what the NGOs are doing is simply saying to the communities, "agree with what we (i.e., the NGO) already intend to do". That approach to advocacy can only serve the self-interest of NGO operators. In open advocacy, access to mobilizing and utilizing public resources, including information channels, is enhanced by the elimination of self-serving purposes. As a result the social services delivered by the NGOs would match their advocacy.

That is what the Althorp's Bill, a precursor to the Factory Act of 1833, did for children in the nineteenth century England. The Factory Act brought the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the welfare of children at work bore not just on parents or employers but on the community at large. In more recent times the British Government has encouraged communities to participate in voluntary action. The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his 1999 budget Government's pledge to give twenty-eight pounds to every hundred pounds a taxpayer contributes for good causes. Professor Tony Giddens, in his 1999 BBC Reith lecture, describes such open community participation as a way to reconnect members of the extended family or the larger community to each other in an active, democratic manner that reconstitutes the rights and obligations of members of society.

Openness, therefore, means that NGO operators should be apolitical but outspoken on issues that affect weak members of society so as to attract public support for their cause. It also means that NGOs are

proactive in seeking and providing information so as to protect or advance the public interest. More importantly, openness means NGOs make themselves available to the public and not exclusively to their members, as burial societies or church clubs do. In developed countries an organization such as Christian Aid helps, not just Christians, but also members of other religions in need. It is the kind of advocacy suggested in *The Guardian, Nigeria* (2000) editorial, which highlighted the case of a blind five-month old child, observing that "many cases deserving humanitarian love and sympathy are not attended to because they are not brought to the attention of the public".

Accountability for responsibility

Those who take responsibility for others must be prepared to give and be seen to be giving account of that responsibility. Where accountability is lacking there is also bound to be mistrust. A lack of trust in those to whom responsibility has been given would suggest an absence of the recognition to advance the public interest. The examples proliferate. In Nigeria for instance, Barrett (1985:94) describes public officers as individuals who, "treat their jobs as a sinecure granted them in recognition of their status as indigenes of the state".

Olowu (1999:13) observes that because of the breakdown in the responsibility, reporting and reward system in the African civil service, there is no system of accountability for performance. Zaidi (1999) makes the point that African NGOs have an "ambiguous" relationship with the state and donor agencies that renders them unaccountable to their local public. Edwards and Hulme (1995) believe, "there is a level at which the absence of accountability begins to make the likelihood of ineffective or illegitimate actions by an organization much more probable" (ibid.:9).

Meanwhile, in its *World Development Report*, the World Bank (1997) indicates, "although the State has a central role in ensuring the provision of basic services—education, health infrastructure—it is not obvious that the State must be the only provider or a provider at all". (ibid.:27). The World Bank even believes that the state's choices about provision, financing and regulation of these services must build on the relative

strengths of markets, civil society and state agencies. These statements should therefore provide a basis for African NGOs to mobilize more local resources for their activities. But they can only do this if they are willing to justify their status concerning the public interest. One way they can do so is to provide the public or the community they work with (who may also constitute their benefactors), with regular records of their financial activities. Najam (1996:345) describes this as accountability to clients.

In England charitable organizations with a certain level of income that fail to make annual returns to the Charity Commission are struck off the Charity Register. This is because the Charity Register is a public document that is open to the general public for information and the scrutiny of activities of charitable organizations. Similarly, in the United States, in order to maintain registration with the government, private voluntary organizations must submit a number of documents annually, including audited budgets using USAID forms and Inland Revenue Service reporting forms.

Meanwhile, in developing countries, says Najam, "not only do impoverished communities lack mechanisms for holding NGOs accountable, the process of aspiration definition is also murky and subjective". Even where there are avenues for public accountability (Hiruy 1997:129), there are no sanctions to enforce them because, according to Beurden (1998:50) NGO registration may be required for administrative purposes only, without being legally binding. For instance, in South Africa, of about 54,000 NGOs only 6000 are registered (Hiruy 1997:123). But if African NGOs took the initiative to make accountability a necessary aspect of their responsibility, they would also be able to court public trust and tap more public resources for good causes.

Obligation of NGOs not to make private use of their assets (non-distributiveness)

Any justification for the NGO claim to advance the public interest should be demonstrated in their ability to provide relief and deliver services to their beneficiaries. The extent to which this obligation is fulfilled can be determined by how much of an NGO's money goes into good causes.

Benjamin (2000) reports a study by Manchester Business School which found that, in 1992, 80 per cent of charity (NGO) money was spent on charitable causes. But by 1997 this had fallen to 67 per cent. Although these statistics do not suggest that NGO operators are benefiting from their organization's funds, they show the extent to which NGOs are fulfilling their obligations. Sometimes NGOs spend a large amount of money to produce glossy publicity materials; whether to outshine others in the field or to attract public approval, is not clear.

In the absence of statistics on NGO spending for developing countries, a similar experience can be described for their public service organizations. For instance, in 1995 at the first National Health Summit in Nigeria, the Health Minister noted that 80 per cent of recurrent subvention goes to personnel costs whereas less than 5 per cent was spent on patient care (Federal Ministry of Health 1995). Also in a study on community banks in Nigeria, Onugu (2000) found that only 23.3 per cent of deposits in these banks were ploughed back into the economy. This, according to the author, is because community banks were involved in direct trading.

But non-distributiveness means that NGO operators are not personally interested in their organization's property. When in 1991 community banks were established in Nigeria their chief purpose was to finance non-banking (non-profit) activities such as training in trade and vocational skills. Hudock (1999:7-8) tells how men in Sierra Leone hoped to use their womenfolk to secure foreign NGO funding for their private palm-oil business. Bennett and Gibbs (1996:75) record how African women's groups obtained foreign funds for sewing machines. At first these machines were used to sew uniforms for schoolchildren at a minimum profit (which was shared among members). But when funds ceased to arrive and the machines needed parts to be replaced, coupled with strong competition from a local entrepreneur, the group could not continue. The remaining machines that were still functional were distributed among members. Many such anecdotes exist in the literature.

The above illustrations show the wide variation between developed and developing countries' spending power for good causes. In an

African country where state provision for social services is often very weak, the less an NGO's percentage allocation of funds for good causes is, the less responsive to social needs the NGOs will be seen to be. To change this will require a change of attitude on the part of NGOs and all public service workers. They would need to show willingness to advance the public interest, not their own. In doing so they will reciprocate the public trust reposed in them and a relationship of mutual responsibility between NGO operators and members of the public will then develop. In this way African NGOs would also ensure their own sustainability over time.

Conclusion

Ancient principles of African social life that are rooted in the extended family system can still be exploited for community development. This is mainly because of the principle of mutual responsibility present within the system. In our modern setting when more voluntary organizations are springing up, African NGOs could become more responsive to social needs if they can adapt the principles that have sustained the extended family system to the management principles that have made foreign NGOs successful.

Particularly in advocacy and their claim to responsibility for public interest, the principles of openness and accountability will enable greater public participation in NGO activities. And more importantly, because of their obligation to provide and deliver service, African NGOs should endeavour to apply a greater share of their funds to the causes for which they were established. In this way African NGOs can become focus factors of development between the people and the state.

To the people they would prove to be a focus for effective social advocacy and service delivery. And to the state they would constitute a focus for effective policy implementation. In both ways African NGOs would be able to tap into their local resource base and respond more to social needs as well as contribute towards an inclusive and sustainable bottom-up democratic welfare system.

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