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EDITORIAL

African challenges and challenges to African Studies

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The articles in this issue of ARAS offer very unique views on a range of issues that are relevant to the countries of Africa - the legacies of sexualized violence in conflict; suggestions for preventing conflict; human development; sovereignty and the role of international political and economic imperatives; and the way we understand 'world music' in the age of globalization.

In the article *Sexual Violence in the Congo Free State: Archival Traces and Present Reconfigurations*, Charlotte Mertens presents her extensive archival research conducted in Belgium, and ethnographic research conducted in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Mertens brings to light the ghosts of the past, still haunting this central African nation. Her focus on sexual violence during King Leopold's Congo Free State, and more recently as a result of the ongoing conflict in the DRC, draws our attention to the ongoing legacies of sexualized violence, in particular against women. Mertens argues that this current violence is intricately connected to the colonial past, and is unfortunately enduring into the future.

Obinna Franklin Ifediora argues in his article *Preventive Arbitration: Towards Strengthening the African Union's Mediation Capacity for Human Protection*, that the African Union Commission could strengthen its conflict resolution and pacifying mechanisms through 'preventive arbitration', thus offering the many stakeholders, minority and opposition groups access to relevant and timely mediation, creating enduring peace and human security. Ifediora argues that the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) needs to be restructured to bring 'mediation' into the role of the African Governance Architecture,

The Power of Non-Governmental Organisations in Sudan: Do Structural Changes Matter?

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Abstract

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are seen as drivers of change. This characterisation has led to the proliferation of NGOs, particularly in developing countries. Their numerous strengths and advantages have resulted in them being described as being 'there for the people'. Yet, despite their strengths, they have been criticised for their inability to meet structural and social challenges, as many of them are seen as being too professional, bureaucratic and focused on maintaining their funding, thereby perpetuating underdevelopment. Meanwhile, there are growing concerns regarding the partnership and accountability practices of NGOs. To contribute to this debate, this article will examine the roles of NGOs in the international arena and discuss the impact of funding in the creation and achievement of strategic goals, and how this directly affects the accountability of NGOs. In order to examine these issues, the author uses examples from Sudan to discuss how structural change and autonomy are both necessary for and detrimental to the accountability, reputation and role of NGOs in the development sector.

Introduction

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are self-organised, self-regulated and, as the name suggests, independent of public sector control (although they can be assisted by government funding). Distinctions among NGOs include: whether they are local, national or international; whether they are set up to assist their own communities or to assist others; and whether they focus on service provision, advocacy or both. They are driven by distinct values and operate, to some extent, through a volunteer system. Volunteerism and the cohesive values held by many participants in NGOs are the foundation of these organisations and essential to their function (Atack, 1999). However, there are

¹ The author would like to acknowledge and thank the two anonymous reviewers and the editors for their constructive comments.

numerous NGOs that do not have large numbers of volunteers but rather employ and (in certain instances) handsomely compensate their workers.

The number of NGOs has grown rapidly over the past century. Created in 1840, the Anti-Slavery Society was the first NGO to hold states accountable for their actions (Payne, 2013). Werker and Ahmed (2007) highlight that “the number of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) rose from less than 200 in 1909, to over 20,000 in 2007” (p. 5). Over the last five decades national NGOs have increased in size, number and scope. For instance, by the year 2000 there were more than 10,000 registered NGOs in Tanzania alone (Reuben, 2002). The popularisation and adoption of neoliberal economic policies in developing countries has fuelled this growth, with NGOs able to fill the void left by the minimisation of government support to the public sector (Zaidi, 1999).

In 2008 I conducted research into experiences regarding the North Kordofan Rural Development Project and the White Nile Agriculture Project in Sudan, while in 2014 I completed research that examined the role of NGOs in development and peace stability in the Darfur region. Clearly there has been a dramatic expansion in the number and scope of these organisations in the region. For example, in Darfur alone there are 261 registered community-based organisations and 237 related organisations based in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum. Despite the wide spread of these organisations, their actual contributions remain unknown and there is very limited literature concerning Sudanese NGOs. Hence this article will draw on secondary information, specifically in relation to the historical background, and the research participants’ perspectives, which will contribute greatly to the literature at large.

Literature Review

NGOs range from the large International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) (mostly based in western countries) to small self-help organisations operating at the grassroots level. They are an integral component of the international development and humanitarian sector, particularly at the grassroots level. Since the 1970s, NGOs have become recognised as ‘third states’ that engage in assisting people in many countries to advocate for commendable causes. NGOs are facilitated by a unique structure, vastly different to that of the state or private sector institutions, which enables them to assess the needs of a community and provide assistance rapidly, where governments would otherwise be unable to cope (Van Rooy, 2000). Failure and corruption in

the governments of many developing countries has created a fertile environment for the emergence of NGOs. In the cases of failed states, NGOs have contributed significantly by providing support to local communities; a case in point being Somalia where these organisations have assisted in restoring order and fostering economic activities (Pijovic, 2012). However, whilst the skills of NGO workers and their low-cost projects may be highly beneficial at a local level, their overall influence on international development—for example their impact on poverty reduction—has been relatively small due to their often limited resources in the face of the scale of these global problems and issues.

Strengths and Shortfalls

The primary strength of NGOs is their ability to work closely with beneficiaries to facilitate their direct participation. NGOs rely on local knowledge and utilise local material, which contributes to providing services more efficiently and effectively than external service providers (Willis, 2005) or contracted government institutions. They engage a variety of people in development activities, which are particularly important given concerns in the field with regard to exclusion on the basis of gender, ethnicity, class or religion (Kothari & Minogue, 2002). As such, NGOs are generally deemed to be an appropriate mechanism for overcoming these forms of exclusion. Accordingly, many INGOs have established relationships with national NGOs or formed local structures in order to reach marginalised people.

Despite the above strengths, NGOs have been criticised for their strategic and structural shortfalls—specifically in the areas of partnerships and accountability—which impact their ability to achieve their intended goals. In the 1990s NGOs enjoyed a period of appreciation, however subsequent to this period many NGOs have become negligent with respect to accountability measures. Specifically, during the last decade the media, academia and United Nations agencies have voiced their concerns regarding the accountability and transparency of NGOs and NGOs have been accused of a lack of self-regulation, insufficient reporting and monitoring, as well as a lack of transparent auditing procedures.

The accountability, legitimacy and credibility of national and international NGOs have been questioned by many multinational corporations, governments and international agencies (Hudson, 2000). Interestingly, some NGOs have also emphasised the need for, and importance of, accountability (Marshall, 2002). Some of them are

discussing “how primarily their voice relates to the people they are concerned about” (Slim, 2002, p. 5). Furthermore, the Global Reporting Organisation (2011) has stated that:

Many NGOs face public scrutiny for their practices, including hiring policies, salaries of top executives and the distribution of donated funds. This creates increased pressure on the NGO sector to demonstrate the same level of transparency and accountability as the private sector (p. 1).

Following the same theme, Jennings (2012) wrote in *The Guardian*:

What happens when projects and interventions undertaken by international NGOs go wrong? While these organisations do not deliberately seek to do harm, nonetheless harm does at times occur. With few legal and regulatory frameworks setting out how communities can hold NGOs to account, and with even less support for communities to engage in such a process, there is a significant accountability deficit at the heart of international NGOs.

Accountability is defined by Edwards and Hulme (1996) as “the means by which individuals and Organisations report to a recognized authority (or authorities) and are held accountable for their actions” (p. 967). This is a conventional form of accountability which suggests the importance of relationships with donors, governments and governance boards, with little emphasis on stakeholders and beneficiaries (Lloyd, 2005). The literature comments on the dominance of external upward accountability at the expense of internal organisational values and mission and accountability to beneficiaries (Ebrahim, 2003; Edwards & Hulme, 1996).

Given that the majority of INGOs are established in wealthy countries, it has been argued that they act as “vehicles for democratization”, enforcing Western values and ideologies which often do not fit into the economic and social structure of many non-Western societies (Brumley, 2010, p. 391). Elbers and Schulpen (2013) argue that INGOs wield considerable power over Southern NGOs, influencing the ways in which they operate and the development issues they address.

Their study of three separate Northern NGOs, partnered with respective Southern counterparts in Ghana, India and Nicaragua, found that “the Northern NGOs unilaterally set the rules that govern the partnerships, based on their own norms, values and beliefs” (p. 48). INGOs have also been accused of doubling up on services provided by national governments, creating new professional elites who enjoy high social status and who also enjoy other benefits such as high salaries and financial incentives which often exceed those of senior government officials, as well as hijacking human resources which would otherwise be available to national governments (Rahman, 1995). In this regard, the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2011) estimates that, in Darfur/Sudan, 1,390 health professionals (including doctors, nurses and midwives) have joined NGOs; a figure that is greater than the number of health professionals employed by the State Ministry of Health in North Darfur. The WHO has related this discrepancy to NGOs’ incentives, specifically in relation to the provision of training and supplies.

Partnerships and Funding

During the 1980s, when there was a proliferation of NGOs, their partnerships in the development context also came under scrutiny. Pierre-Louis (2011) argues that the lack of coordination amongst INGOs seriously hinders their ability to achieve sustainable growth. These partnerships could range from informal relationships between small NGOs and local communities (Matsaert et al., 2007) to agreements between donor governments and national NGOs, and even formal accredited arrangements between INGOs and multilateral agencies such as the United Nations. A lack of coordination and lack of partnerships can lead to a waste of human resources and capital. For example, David Damberger elucidates this in reference to a Canadian NGO ‘Engineers without Borders’ that had been involved in implementing a water-pump device in Malawi. After commencing operations, the Canadian NGO realised that an identical device had been previously built by an American NGO but had failed due to lack of maintenance (Damberger, 2011). If greater communication had existed between the INGO and local communities, both time and money could have been saved by repairing the old device rather than implementing a new system. Furthermore, NGOs are becoming increasingly more reliant on donor governments for funding, which make them more vulnerable to shifts in funding strategies; a problem recently demonstrated when Australia and

New Zealand instituted radical changes to the provision of foreign aid by changing the focus from poverty issues to economic development (Banks et al., 2011 & Wood, 2011).

Having introduced the ongoing debate about NGOs, the following sections will examine the roles and contributions of the Sudanese NGOs. To understand the nature and performance of NGOs operating in the Sudan, I devoted some time to discerning how these organisations interact with local communities and government institutions, and what contributions have been made in development sector. I gathered relevant secondary information and conducted interviews and focus group discussions with diverse participants at national and regional levels, specifically in North Kordofan and the White Nile states. Representatives from six national NGOs, as well as academics and development professionals, participated in these interviews. The participants were questioned as to their experiences and perceptions with regard to development interventions, with special attention to the role and contributions of NGOs. Ethics clearance was obtained from both Massey University² and the University of Canberra. Additionally, participants were informed of their rights with regard to confidentiality and ethics under the charter of the relevant institution.

Sudanese NGOs

The history of NGOs in Sudan can be dated back to the mid-1920s and early 1930s when social organisations were established to promote and rectify issues regarding education and social services, to defend the rights of the newly emerging Sudanese working classes, and to advocate for Sudanese independence (UNDP, 2009). Formal NGOs started to emerge by the late 1950s following the ratification of the first voluntary work law in 1957, known as the Societies Registration Act. The Act was generally described as being very democratic and opened a huge space for growth and participation in public life. In fact, even during the autocratic regime of President Gaafar Nimeiri (1969-1985) there were many restrictive policies but the same law remained (UNDP, 2009). Based on their ideological backgrounds and roles, NGOs in Sudan can generally be classified into five categories. To begin with, there are

² The information regarding the historical development of civil society organisations in Sudan was gathered in 2007 while the author was based at Massey University, New Zealand.

socially-oriented organisations which focus on providing social and public services, such as adult education and health services, in both urban and rural areas. Secondly there are the politically-affiliated organisations which may appear neutral but in reality are supported and funded by political parties. Thirdly, there exist trade unions (work-based organisations) and, fourthly, there are academic and technically-oriented organisations that control research or academic institutions and can commonly be found in the capital cities. Finally, there are religious organisations that offer both social services and spiritual support. All of the aforementioned organisations exist at national and regional levels, while at the grassroots level there are mainly social and religious organisations. The 1980s witnessed an explosion in the number of these organisations and the number of functioning civil society organisations had reached in excess of 3000 by the end of 2008 (UNDP, 2009). The infamous 1983/84 famine and drought of the North Kordofan and North Darfur regions (Teklu et al., 1991), as well as the eruption of civil war in the south of Sudan (1983-2005) and the increasing number of INGOs led to the spread of NGOs throughout the country.

In 1979, the Government of Sudan (GoS) established the Sudan Council of Voluntary Agencies (SCOVA) to undertake the following: development of voluntary activities; recording and exchanging of information; networking between specialised groups; capacity-building through training and sensitisation; cooperation with relevant government bodies; and strengthening of bilateral relations at regional and international levels. SCOVA remains a functioning agency in the current GoS but now heavily supervises the activities of NGOs. SCOVA records show that there are approximately 400 organisations registered with them, yet the number of functioning NGOs exceeds 3000 which suggests that many NGOs do not collaborate with SCOVA and distance themselves from its activities (UNDP, 2009). There are multiple reasons for this, but human rights issues in particular have resulted in a general mistrust of the GoS.

During the period from 1975 to 1989 legislation existed that was supportive of the growth of NGOs. At that time any group of seven people had the right to establish an NGO. In return NGOs were simply expected to send an annual report to the director of National Voluntary Work and provide audited annual accounts. However, the 1989 military coup undertaken by Colonel Omar al-Bashir (now the President) resulted in the overthrow of the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi. The consequences of this *coup d'état* for

civil society organisations (such as NGOs and trade unions) was immense, as all were dissolved by the end of that year. A new law enacted in 1991 required civil society organisations to re-register, but required they declare and report all donations and sources of funding. This law adversely affected the functioning of many trade unions and, as a result, the number of unions had decreased from 104 to 26 by the end of the 1990s. Contradictory interests have since influenced the remaining unions and largely transformed them into political organisations controlled, co-opted or suppressed by the government (Mohammed, 2001). This may be due to the fact that, throughout Sudan's political history, trade unions have played a vital role in the rise and fall of military regimes. The government of President Omar al-Bashir, in office since 1989, continued to act in the same manner until 2005 by constructing protective measures aimed at reducing or controlling the role of trade unions, particularly in the political arena.

After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) between the North and the South of Sudan in January 2005, the government created more space for civil society organisations to develop greater relationships with INGOs and donors. It also allowed political parties to resume work and trade unions were formed again through what appeared to be democratic processes, though concerns remain regarding the transparency of the election processes. The GoS also established the Humanitarian Aid Commission to oversee all humanitarian organisations and to commit to the removal of obstacles to their work. However, on 20 February 2006, members of Parliament passed the Voluntary and Humanitarian Work Act.

The 2006 Act defines a Sudanese non-governmental voluntary organisation as an “organisation that may be established by citizens, groups or individuals and having the financial ability to establish and sustain charitable activities” (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies [IFRC], 2006, p. 1). In order to register a voluntary or charitable organisation, the Act requires the organisation to have a minimum of 30 members. However, if the organisation has less than 30 members, “the Minister [of Humanitarian Affairs] may approve the registration of an organisation on condition that [the organisation] has financial capacity, sustainability, sources of funding, and is registered”. The Act sets a number of principles (IFRC, 2006, p. 3) that include:

- Non-discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, ethnicity, political affiliation or religious beliefs;
- Non-interference of foreign voluntary organisations in the internal affairs of the Sudan in a way that may infringe on the sovereignty of the country.

The International Centre for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL) (2006) points that the terms “non-interference” and “internal affairs” are undefined and hence provide “implementing officials” (p. 33) substantial discretion in determining whether an organisation’s activities are in violation of the Act. Moreover, the Act prohibits registered civil society organisations from receiving funds or grants from abroad, from a foreign person within the country or from any other entity without the approval of the Minister. Participants from various NGOs view the Act as a tool for imposing excessive control of their activities. In fact, the current rules governing the receipt of funds have become a method of prohibiting the establishment of projects that the government does not favour (IFRC, 2006). Amnesty International viewed the 2006 Act as the GoS exercising power over NGO operations. The participants of this research have confirmed during focus group discussions that since then NGOs have frequently complained that the government has interfered with their work and imposed numerous restrictions upon them. Some participants have also accused the government of designing the current Act to suppress Sudanese civil society. They refer to notable examples such as the closure and deregistration of the ARRY Organisation for Human Rights and Development and the el-Khatim Adlan Centre for Enlightenment and Human Development on 31 December 2013.

After the International Criminal Court (ICC) issued an arrest warrant for President Omar al-Bashir for war crimes charges on 4 March 2009, the government expelled thirteen INGOs—including Oxfam Great Britain, the International Rescue Committee, and CARE International—and revoked the licences of three national NGOs—the Amal Centre for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, the Khartoum Centre for Human Rights Development and Environment, and the Sudan Social Development Organisation (Integrated Regional Information Networks [IRIN], 2009). Many of the expelled international organisations were involved in emergency relief, food security and livelihood support programs, while the national organisations were engaged in human rights issues. According to the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (2009) these organisations delivered more than 50 per cent of overall aid

entering Sudan. The government accused these organisations of violating local laws and regulations (NBC News, 2009).

Partnerships and Networking

My research demonstrates that many national Sudanese organisations have relationships with INGOs and United Nations agencies. The Department for International Development (DFID) (2012) states that the DFID “will not channel any money through the Government of Sudan, and will continue to provide funds through NGOs, private sector firms and multilateral agencies” (p. 3). The DFID explains that the Government of Sudan has not fulfilled the UK’s partnership commitments, which include poverty reduction, human rights and international obligations, as well as the strengthening of financial management and accountability. In the period spanning 2011 to 2014, the DFID spent the equivalent of £47 million (DFID, 2014) supporting various development and humanitarian activities in Sudan. Furthermore, the DFID’s fund is primarily delivered through multilateral agencies, such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). However, the UNDP utilised some of these funds to finance national NGOs (UNDP, 2009) and all of the NGO representatives I interviewed confirmed to me that they worked in partnership with UN agencies or INGOs. The UNDP also reported that in the last six years, through their Funds Management Unit “more than US\$600 million were disbursed to national NGOs” (2016, p. 1).

The relationships between NGOs and international organisations are constructed around receiving financial and technical support from international donors. Unfortunately, this dependency relationship has impacted on the performance and accountability of Sudanese NGOs and their relationships with government authorities and the local people. The critical question is whether these NGOs are capable of playing a significant role in development interventions. In practice, most national NGOs are not engaged in governance or local community development at the grassroots level and primarily function at a central level. During a focus group discussion, a female academic with previous experience working in rural areas explained:

Rural women are suffering because of illiteracy and lack of services. However, those national NGOs, who always talk

about gender issues and rural women, never go there and make a real contribution to change that situation.

Concerns about Transparency and Accountability

I had the opportunity to attend two workshops (funded and supported by the UNDP) in Khartoum and El-Obeid. These workshops were attended by members of 68 NGOs, academics, journalists and representatives of INGOs. All of the NGO members I interviewed complained about the government restrictions and discrimination they faced. On the other hand, there were also widespread negative public perceptions surrounding the contributions made by national NGOs. It was evident that national and regional organisations are almost non-existent at grassroots level, particularly in North Kordofan and the White Nile States where I undertook my fieldwork research.

A gender specialist from the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry commented:

Many members of NGOs are looking after their personal benefits. They drive cars, travel abroad and organise workshops, in fact they know how to please the donors and the international agencies which finance them and no one knows what they are doing and no one dares to criticise them.

During interviews with NGO representatives, regardless of their political orientation, I was unable to obtain concrete evidence of their programs, activities and funding. They demonstrated no interest in sharing information and claimed that “those who suspect their intentions do not truly know what is going on”.

As stated by Burger and Owens (2010), “it is plausible that many NGOs may feel compelled to withhold the truth from the public eye in order to keep afloat in a competitive funding market dictated by unrealistic donor expectations and pressures” (p. 1263). Indeed, the current systems of accountability result in NGOs being primarily concerned with answering to donors rather than the very people they are supposed to be assisting. Hence potential improvements should seek to shift answerability to beneficiaries as well as international donors. There are a variety of possible solutions to this challenge. Murtaza (2011) explains that in order to improve the accountability process, and thereby improve the services provided by NGOs, it is necessary for NGOs to be

accountable to communities, which requires grassroots participation. This can be achieved by “increasing the frequency, formality, influence, span, concentration of authority, and scrutiny powers of community involvement in strategic and functional levels” (pp. 122-23). Barber and Bowie (2008) point out the need to educate donors and gain their support for operations that will have the best effect on beneficiaries. This can be achieved by obtaining greater commitment from donors, governments and/or private citizens, and putting in place exit strategies for if resources are discontinued. However, due to the large number and diversity of NGOs, there exists no singular approach or model of accountability that can be generically applied. Nevertheless, practical accountability ideas can be gained from surveying existing codes of conduct. For example, the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) (2010) has developed a Code of Conduct which provides NGOs with a general standard of conduct in relation to accountability and self-assessment processes. Furthermore, it provides accreditation to NGOs who adopt prescribed practices and abide by their standards, which in turn offers NGOs a further source of legitimacy.

Funding

It is evident from the responses of certain participants that INGOs and other development agencies must alter the way they operate. For example one participant stated,

Large amounts of our organisation’s fund goes towards salaries; the training of staff and running costs such as rent and fuel. What is left over for development is a very small amount. As an employee of an international NGO and a leader of a local NGO, I feel that I have developed myself rather than developing others.

NGOs generally have two funding options: the first is to receive donations from citizens / donors and the second is to receive funds from the government. However, each has its own drawbacks (Powell & Seddon, 1997). Funding will remain a challenge for NGOs in Sudan as well as in many developing countries as long as they continue to rely heavily on donor support. Challenges include NGOs becoming more accountable to donors than to beneficiaries and governments attempting to influence the operational priorities of NGOs through funding, such as

in the aforementioned case where the GoS expelled a number of INGOs and cancelled the licences of three national NGOs.

While donors provide funds, these funds are not unconditional, as donor demands must be fulfilled and NGOs can become restricted from working effectively under such donor demands. In some cases, NGOs face difficulties when trying to balance their relationships with donors, from whom they receive funds, and the beneficiaries, who are the primary stakeholders of funded projects. Donors expect to receive constant updates and progress reports about funded projects. However, given that NGOs rely on donors for money and donors rely on NGOs for their reputation in development, it is mutually beneficial for transparency to become an integral component of the operations of NGOs.

Public confidence in national NGOs has declined and will take considerable time to recover, as many INGOs and UN agencies have been linked with suspicious groups, particularly those seen to be collaborating with powerful elites or politically affiliated NGOs. Those who are not involved with these NGOs have criticised their performance, the behaviour of members and connections with outsiders. A male journalist commented:

Our non-governmental organisations are controlled by highly educated people, who seem to be permanent employees with unknown employers, speak foreign languages, stay in the capital or big cities and are very good in organising workshops and meetings; in fact being a civil society activist is a very profitable job.

Another female participant who was a former UN gender expert commented:

In Sudan, particularly in urban areas, we do not experience any gender inequality. Unfortunately, our female Sudanese NGOs have voiced their concerns and claimed to have experienced exclusion and oppression, for the sole purpose of receiving financial support from International donors and organisations. However, I own and manage factories and enterprises, supervise male technicians and workers, travel abroad to arrange for purchasing some material, and have never faced any gender inequality. These resources,

which were wasted by NGOs in arguing over gender issues, I wish [had been] directed to the development [so that they could have by now lifted] of Africa's women from their misery.

Elitism

During the last three decades many NGOs (including professional NGOs) have been accused of being linked to powerful elites or political parties. A male academic from the University of Khartoum corroborated this, stating:

One of the problems of this country is that most of these NGOs claim that they are concerned about development, but they are not. They are either supporting this political party or that one, or have other hidden agendas. Unfortunately, it becomes a personal business. Many national organisations [have been] led by the same persons or group of people for the last two or three decades.

The UNDP (2009) reported that NGOs in Sudan are “portrayed as suffering from elitism, manipulation, exclusivity, poor capacities and being urban based and urban biased” (p. 13). This situation is not unique to Sudanese NGOs, as there are countless cases all over the globe where these same traits are exhibition. Pretty and Scoones (1995) state that many NGOs in the developing world, particularly ‘non-membership organisations’³, are not accountable and have wasted the resources and time of local people.

Based on my fieldwork research, I believe that many NGOs and INGOs have wasted many of the opportunities provided to assist local communities and contribute to the development process. To improve their performance, NGOs should operate as not-for-profit organisations and function with an independent governance structure such as a management board (Chene, 2013). The selection process for the board must be transparent and details for the election of members should be publically available. NGOs should clearly explain their values,

³ Non-membership organisations are established by a small number of people, and are thus exclusive and do not include others or the public in the decision-making processes.

obligations and operational procedures and enforce a code of conduct. There should be clear policies to address conflicts of interest, financial corruption or extortion, and risks to the community. NGOs should inform their stakeholders of their source(s) of funding, spending, financial performance, objectives and outcomes. Furthermore, financial auditing should be undertaken frequently by an independent party.

Grassroots organisations

In rural areas of the Sudan, many international organisations are partaking in the development process through loan-based rural development projects by implementing microcredit, agro-forestry and health services activities. As a protective measure against exclusion, many international organisations such as the World Bank and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), operating at the grassroots level, have placed the formation of new community organisations, through democratic procedures, at the centre of their interventions (IFAD, 2002). Through the introduction of these 'democratic procedures', these projects have introduced new ways of selecting community representatives. In the North Kordofan and White Nile projects, the staff of IFAD projects, primarily highly educated Sudanese, have introduced procedures for nomination, voting and election of community organisation members. It is evident that these new procedures have created division and tension in some rural areas, as those not selected have felt rejected and decided to remain distant. A former minister explained that:

The Sudanese society is very unique; the social institution at grassroots level is stronger than the government and operates through a consultative local constitution. Our main problem [is] those who were educated in the West and insist on living in isolation: they think, plan and implement alone and never consider people's knowledge, practices, needs and priorities, nor learn from the accumulated knowledge and experiences of those who acquired the true knowledge, 'the locals'.

Comparing national, regional and grassroots organisations

Many national and regional NGOs (at state level) are involved with international organisations in planning and implementing various development activities. However, the majority of these NGOs,

particularly in Khartoum and other state capitals, have failed to implement sound and visible projects that can claim to have made significant contributions to community development at the grassroots level. The majority of participants interviewed in North Kordofan villages were unaware of the roles and names of the regional NGOs, which exceeded 250 in the capital of this state alone. Despite donor trust in them, most NGOs at national or state levels lack leadership and members who are accountable to their beneficiaries. The majority of national NGOs engage in political debate, and lack both coordination capacities and honourable reputations. On the other hand, grassroots organisations at the village level may lack the capacity to initiate the changes needed by local communities. Despite this reality, most of the voluntary grassroots associations in North Kordofan state, where I conducted my fieldwork research, have proven to be a good representation of people's realities and capable of mobilising local communities. This in turn supports the notion that people only find themselves in a truly participatory organisation when they share common concerns and volunteer to act collectively (Brohman, 1996).

Challenges faced by NGOs in Sudan

I observed that national and regional NGOs have an intense public presence and publicity. Their large numbers at both national and regional levels and their relationships with INGOs and other development agencies are evident. Nevertheless, it appears that their credibility is questionable in that their members have been accused of mobilising resources for themselves rather than for local communities: a fact which may explain the lack of sympathy for NGOs when their activities are restricted by the government. Furthermore, NGOs in the Sudan, particularly those working in development sector, face other critical challenges, including a lack of capital resources. In order to put their theoretical claims about development into practice, they should be made accountable to those whom they claim to serve. Likewise, they need to build transparent structures and networks. Moreover, in order for NGOs in the Sudan to avoid the state's restrictive measures, they need self-discipline, ethical codes and an internal commitment to the values of democracy, transparency and accountability (Abdel-Ati, 2006).

In the Sudan the INGOs and development agencies could adopt relevant participatory approaches and engage grassroots organisations in development initiatives. This will help them to establish new

relationships with stakeholders and view people as partners and actors in their own development. If rational and productive approaches that empower local communities are to be employed, certain conditions need to be considered, particularly by donors. For example, international development agencies must recognise that grassroots Organisations are integral to participation, and must support them to manage their own development. This requires building up their capacities and providing them with, or facilitating the flow of, resources. They also need to view development as a dynamic, ongoing process rather than as isolated projects designed and managed by outsiders.

Conclusion

Development theorists have placed emphasis on the importance of the role of civil society groups in providing services and advocacy. These organisations today lie at the heart of development practice and all INGOs and international development agencies, such as the UNDP, involve them in their development activities. These engagements are based on an assumption that NGOs are able to respond more quickly to people's needs and mobilise more resources than government institutions. This understanding has opened more space for local NGOs in many developing countries to interact with international development providers and attract more resources.

Overall the number of development NGOs has grown rapidly, because of their critical and expanding role in the fight against poverty and for social and environmental justice. Due to this expansion and their political roles, NGOs need to be subject to the same requirements for accountability and scrutiny that they demand of the state, multilateral and corporate domains (Adair, 2001). NGOs should adopt transparent representation mechanisms by electing board members from the NGO membership and appointing independent board members from key stakeholders. A code of conduct, which sets out guidelines and basic standards for NGOs, is a necessity. Furthermore, there should be continued efforts to strive for external accountability and transparency through mechanisms such as reporting, performance assessments, evaluations and participation. Having a strict monitoring system in place will ensure that NGOs are not abusing their power and are taking responsibility for their actions. Looking towards the future, NGOs must seek to improve their accountability and transparency as they make significant contributions and have the potential to drastically improve development outcomes.

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