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# Introduction

Public sector reform in Africa through decentralising central government authority from the centre to the local level has been a major policy direction of both donors and national governments in recent years. The purpose of this report is to explore the implications of this for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) engaged in promoting development in Africa. Given the current trend for decentralisation it is vital that NGOs develop appropriate strategies for working with decentralised government in supporting greater democracy in local governance. And while there has been much discussion of the concept of 'good governance' in aid policy, this has focused on national rather than local levels of government.

This report examines the local institutional framework within which NGOs work, including local government and district administration (which represent central government at a local level), as well as local civil society organisations. While much has been written about the relationship between NGOs and the state (Bratton 1989, Farrington and Bebbington, et al. 1993, Hulme and Edwards 1997 for example), the relationship between NGOs and local government is an area in which little substantial research has been undertaken (although see Reilly 1995 on Latin America). Central to the argument running throughout this report is that the role of NGOs must be considered within a much broader context of state-civil society relations in rural Africa.

An additional motivation for undertaking this research is that many development NGOs have been working with community-based organisations within local, rather than national constituencies. While they may not have the capacity to undertake lobbying and advocacy work at the level of national policy-making, they may be able to exert more influence with government at the level of local service provision. In addition, the importance of strengthening democracy at the local level, not just the national level, is of more immediate concern to rural communities remote from national capitals. It is argued that the administration of development projects in Africa is a highly political process and for this reason NGOs need to recognise the opportunities for local level advocacy through project implementation rather than viewing advocacy solely in terms of national level policy-making.

A central argument in this report is that improving governance does not just depend on strengthening civil society but cannot be done independently of the state. This is even more imperative at the local level; local government in Africa has been characterised by inadequate resources, low morale and dependence on the centre. It is argued in this report that NGOs need to consider opportunities for co-operation and developing partnerships with local government and other decentralised government bodies in order to improve local governance, as well as working with groups within civil society. The necessity for mutual support suggests that donor programmes to strengthen civil society in rural areas should not be done without regard to local government. This has serious implications for channelling donor funding for service provision to NGOs since the long-term impact may undermine government structures at the local level; this in turn may undermine the development of civil society (Davis, Hulme and Woodhouse 1994). Furthermore, NGOs may lack local legitimacy and be unaccountable to the communities in which they are working. While NGOs may play a major role in local service provision, such activities are not usually co-ordinated. There is need for a democratically accountable framework to take on overall co-ordination, and it is this role that local authorities are most able to fulfil. Central government, even if

democratically elected, cannot be so responsive to local needs as a democratically elected local government. Donors and NGOs need to recognise that strengthening civil society at a local level cannot be done without reference to the role of local government (Smith and Sheldrake 1994).

Chapter 1 of this report provides a theoretical overview of civil society in Africa. It rejects the idealisation of civil society in recent development policy and argues that civil society and the state are mutually inter-dependent in Africa and the former cannot be strengthened without considering its impact on the state. Furthermore, it is argued that civil society itself in Africa contains a vast array of different groups, some of which are progressive and supportive of democracy, others of which are not. Therefore, if NGOs are concerned with support for civil society it is essential for them to understand the roles and relationships of different groups within civil society and how they relate to the state, and most critically which actors are politically powerful and why.

In Chapter 2, the growth of NGOs in Africa over the last decade is examined. It is argued that this has more to do with structural adjustment programmes and new public management promoted by donors than as an outcome of changes within civil society in Africa. It then explores the issue of collaboration between NGOs and the state in service provision, and highlights the opportunities for NGOs to have an important role in policy implementation even when their involvement in national level advocacy is limited.

Chapter 3 discusses different models of decentralisation in Africa, ranging from administrative deconcentration to political devolution, with examples from Uganda, Botswana and Tanzania. While most countries have some form of elected local government, the authority and responsibility exercised by local government varies enormously from country to country. In some countries either district offices of line ministries or the district commissioner's office are far more important for implementing local development projects than local government. In terms of NGO-government collaboration at the local level, NGOs need to work with deconcentrated central government agencies rather than local government. For this reason, decentralised government is the general term used in this report to refer to local level state agencies. This incorporates both devolved local government and deconcentrated bodies. In Chapter 4, short case studies are presented showing examples of effective collaboration between various NGOs and decentralised government bodies. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the report by discussing key issues for strengthening local governance and their implications for NGOs.

It should be noted that this research is based on secondary sources rather than on primary research in the field. Most of the findings have been drawn from a review of available documentation, both published and unpublished. This have been supplemented by information obtained from interviews which were conducted during short visits to Tanzania and Kenya, as well as from meetings in the UK and Denmark. The report is primarily aimed at those either working for NGOs or funding NGO activities, in order to help them to think more strategically about their engagement with both government and civil society organisations at the local level.

# Chapter 1

## Civil Society in Africa

This chapter discusses the relationship between civil society and the state in Africa. The analysis of the interrelationships between non-governmental development NGOs and decentralised government needs to be underpinned with a sound understanding of the wider context of state–civil society relations in Africa. There are important issues which relate specifically to Africa and need to be highlighted at the outset of this report. Much discussion on the notion of civil society within the aid community in recent years has been very generalised and uncritical. As is argued below, Western liberal notions of the relationship between civil society and the state is based on the assumption of strong state legitimacy. Such an assumption, it is argued cannot be made for much of Africa.

Before examining more closely how the notion of civil society relates to Africa, it is important to set out some of the main debates over the definition of civil society. There are many diverse views stemming from different schools of political thought and from different experiences of state. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed review of the theoretical literature on civil society (see, for example, Gellner 1996, Hall 1995, Harbeson 1994), but two major points of contention will be discussed: first, what types of associations should be included as part of civil society; and secondly, what is the nature of the relationship between civil society and the state.

Very broadly, civil society can be defined as those organisations that exist between the level of the family and the state which enjoy a degree of autonomy from the state and the market, and which provide a counterbalance to the power of the state and the market. There has been much debate over whether or not civil society can be more precisely defined. There are essentially two main positions regarding what types of organisation should be considered as part of civil society: the exclusive position and the inclusive position.

The first position attaches ideological value to civil society. It equates civil society with democratisation and only those organisations that are actively supportive of democratic processes are considered to be part a of it. Many other types of organisation are excluded from this definition of civil society on the grounds that they do not actively engage with the state but instead are inward-looking or have a very parochial outlook (Chazan 1994: 256). Religious groups with a fundamentalist outlook, ethnic associations and local traditional organisations would all be excluded from civil society. The types of organisation that would be included are those familiar in Western liberal society: voluntary organisations, popular fronts, trade unions and professional associations. Such organisations are engaged in negotiating on behalf of their members or third parties in relation to the state and in doing so are thought to make the state more democratically accountable to its citizens.

The problem with this view is essentially how can these assessments of the level of engagement with the state be made? Civil society becomes more or less limited to formal, modern organisations which actively and explicitly represent the interests of their members *vis-à-vis* the state. Many other forms of organisation, such as traditional, cultural and informal associations, would be excluded from such definitions. There is a danger that if a Western

concept of civil society is applied in other contexts, huge areas of associational life will be overlooked. For example, in reviewing its applicability to Africa, Azarya remarks that those who are involved in civil society according to this restricted definition constitute only a 'very thin layer of population in Africa' (Azarya 1994:96). There is also the possibility that some associations may be of a parochial or inward-looking nature, but nevertheless have the potential to engage with the state more directly. Furthermore, it is important to recognise that there are many different forms of resistance to state incursion. For example, withdrawal from state initiatives rather than direct engagement has often been used as a form of opposition by African peasant societies in resisting government attempts to control production (Hyden 1980).

An alternative to seeking to identify organisations which fit some 'ideal' of civil society is the approach that includes a much broader range of organisations within civil society. This 'inclusivist' approach recognises the fact that the relationships between civil society and the state are highly complex and operate at multiple levels of engagement. Rather than seeking to identify certain types of organisation which fit a restricted definition of civil society, the task for social analysts is to undertake a much broader analysis and seek to understand the complex ways, both formal and informal, in which groups interact with each other and with the state. According to this view, the key question that must be addressed is what are the roles of different actors within civil society?

This approach makes no judgement on the effectiveness of civil society in counterbalancing state power, in promoting democracy or even in having a positive impact on society; certain groups within civil society may fulfil these roles, others may not. Rather than equating civil society with democracy, it is necessary to identify what elements within civil society are likely to promote democracy, and equally, what elements of civil society are likely to resist it. This position has been clearly articulated by White.

Depending on the context, some elements of civil society would be politically uninvolved, some tolerant or supportive of authoritarian rule, some working towards an alternative conception of democracy radically different from the liberal version and some 'progressive' in the sense that they favour and foster a liberal democratic polity. Thus any statement to the effect that a 'strong' civil society is more conducive to democratisation would be meaningless unless one went further to identify the specific constellation of politically active social forces which support democratization in a given context. (White 1996:182-3)

A good example of the use of this broad, inclusivist position has been taken by Chabal (1994) in his study of power in Africa. He sees civil society in Africa as a vast ensemble of consistently changing groups and individuals whose only common ground is exclusion from the state. Whereas the state is a modern creation, civil society contains both modern and traditional groups. In order to understand the nature of power in Africa it is essential to look beyond formal political processes and understand the complex interrelationships between civil society and the state. As Chabal writes, 'civil society is often without formal power but not without power'. An analysis of civil society therefore is essential for widening the analysis beyond formal political processes. This applies at both the central and local government levels.

A further problem with any attempt to define civil society more precisely is the fact that the boundaries between civil society, the state and the market are by no means distinct. Many organisations straddle the boundary between civil society and the state, such as those established by the state but which are semi-autonomous from the state. This would include official trade unions in the public sector, state sponsored women's or youth organisations. Equally, the boundary between civil society and the market is blurred. Co-operatives, for example, are membership organisations engaged in commercial activities. Normally commercial organisations are excluded from civil society on the grounds that they exist essentially for the pursuit of profit. When they are undertaking commercial transactions they are operating within the market, not civil society. However, there is an ambiguity arising from the fact that commercial organisations may undertake roles in addition to purely commercial transactions. Many companies fund voluntary work, set up charitable trusts, provide endowments and support certain social groups. These are not market-oriented activities but rather are aimed at supporting civil society. Thus, while commercial organisations are primarily involved in the market they can also play a significant role in civil society through the provision of funding.

A major point of debate has been over the relationship between civil society and the state. There are two broad views on this relationship. The first sees the relationship between civil society and the state as essentially oppositional, antagonistic and conflictual. This notion is found in Western liberal thought in which civil society is viewed as the means by which individuals are protected from incursion of the state and by which state power is limited. Civil society needs to be strengthened essentially in order to provide a buttress against the state to protect individual citizens. The second sees civil society and the state as mutually interdependent and complementary rather than as mutually antagonistic. This reciprocal view regards civil society and the state as neither fully autonomous nor fully self-sufficient. According to this view, strengthening civil society cannot be done independently of the state and certainly not at the expense of the state. As Reno (1995:19) notes, 'state power and societal networks are more intimately linked than attention to state or society would have us believe'.

Both views have their merits but primarily in relation to the realities of the state in particular countries. The first model of civil society seems most appropriate for societies with a very strong, pervasive state, such as former communist regimes. In such societies, civil society took on a very confrontational position in relation to the state in order to demand democratic transition. Where the state is very powerful, civil society's primary role may be to challenge the power of the state. In other societies, especially much of Africa where the state is relatively weak and fragile, the second model may be more appropriate. In order to promote long-term democratic governance, both the state and civil society need to be strengthened. A weak state will not be able to provide the political stability and legislative framework in which a strong civil society can develop.

White (1996) provides a useful illustration of this by comparing South Korea and Zambia, both of which have undergone transitions towards democratic government in recent years. In South Korea, rapid economic growth since the 1960s had been managed by a highly authoritarian military regime which repressed all opposition activities. However, industrialisation encouraged the formation of new social classes which gathered strength in the 1970s and 1980s. Church organisations and student groups become the main vehicles of opposition for the emerging middle classes, while movements organised by industrial workers

came increasingly into conflict with the state. By the mid-1980s, popular protest towards the state gathered momentum in the form of protests and strikes. This intensified throughout the late 1980s leading eventually to democratic elections. Civil society played the crucial role in opposing the authoritarian state and bringing about democratic transition. White argues that the prospects for sustained democracy in South Korea are good given the fact that there is a sound socio-economic basis for pro-democracy groups within civil society and also that the state itself is strong. While the authoritarian nature of the state has been restrained, the state institutions remained intact during the transition to democracy.

In Zambia, by contrast, the decline of the state was a major factor in the transition to democracy. The post-colonial state in Zambia was 'dominant but weak' (White 1996:203), referring to the fact that while the government may have attempted to be authoritarian it lacked the resources and expertise to do so. The relative weakness of the state was compounded by the long period of political and economic decline in the 1980s and in particular the structural adjustment programme which severely undermined the state. The decline in Kaunda's government created space for the activation of civil society, of which the trade union movement was the key player. The combination of crisis in the state and increasing opposition forces led to democratic elections in 1991 when Chiluba's MMD party was elected. However, the new government inherited a weak, severely under-resourced state and the socio-economic base of those groups in civil society supportive of the democratic change is itself vulnerable. Because of these factors, White concludes that the prospects for sustainable democracy are not good for Zambia,

Thus the notion of civil society that has developed in Western democracy as a counterweight to state power needs to be modified. While civil society does indeed have this role, state and civil society are not engaged in a 'zero-sum' game for power. This is especially important in countries with weak states and weak civil society. In such situations, both need to be strengthened in order to support democratic governance.

Furthermore, civil society and the state can be mutually reinforcing and supportive. In a recent paper, Evans (1996) examines the notion of 'synergy' in the relationship between civil society and the state. He sets out the types of mutually supportive relationship between them. The first of these is complementarity, in which the state and civil society provide functions and roles. An effective state provides and enforces universal rules which provide a framework within which civil society can operate. These can help ensure that weaker elements within civil society are not ignored or excluded by stronger elements. The state may provide the regulatory power which limits the dominance of local elites over subordinate groups. The other type of relationship is embeddedness. This is less tangible but refers to the 'dense networks that span public/private boundaries'. An example of this is the fact that public officials are also private citizens and they are each involved in multiple relationships and social networks from which they draw upon in both public and private life. On a more pessimistic note, Evans finds that it is egalitarian societies with robust democracies that provide the most fertile ground for state-civil society synergy; this does not bode well for many societies in the South which lack both these criteria. However, he does argue that synergy is constructable given creative cultural and organisational innovations.

Whatever the context, civil society cannot be analysed independently of the state. In an African context it is essential to have a historical perspective on state formation in order to understand the position of the state. Chabal (1994) argues that the state in Africa did not (with

certain exceptions, notably Ethiopia and Egypt) develop from within but was a colonial construction. The idea of the nation-state does not have the same entrenched historical legitimacy as in much of Europe. Most modern African nation-states are basically reconstructed colonies and have no pre-colonial precedence. These states were states before they were nations and the task of nationalist leaders has been to create a sense of nationhood. This has been a highly complex process which has been relatively successful in some countries and has gone disastrously wrong in others. The main point for analysis is to examine the historical development and status of the state.

As a consequence of these historical processes, the state is not nearly as powerful or monolithic as has been assumed. The post-colonial state needs to be understood as a development of the colonial state. Many of the features of the post-colonial states have their roots in colonial state. The colonial state was essentially a centralised coercive state. Furthermore, it was a bureaucratic state in which bureaucrats themselves held executive power and formulated policy. Local government was an arm of the central government; it was accountable to central government, not to local citizens. This dominance of the colonial state resulted in the fact that the main focus of independence struggles was the capture of the colonial state. However, once this had been achieved the nature of state power changed. Most importantly, whereas the colonial state was explicitly based on coercion the post-colonial state had to appeal to the people for its own legitimacy. Yet the nationalists inherited state apparatus that were not based on principles of accountability to their citizens. Thus there has been a serious gap between the ideology of many post-colonial states on the one hand and the state apparatus on the other.

This also has had important implications for 'political accountability' and links to the relations of reciprocity and inequality between rulers and ruled. Chabal (1994) argues that because the concept of the nation-state was relatively undeveloped, the line of accountability from bureaucracy to state to nation was not fully developed. Bureaucrats and politicians operated as in the colonial period without the constraints imposed by the imperial government. Formal accountability upwards was removed but accountability downwards to the citizens was not properly developed (although in practice the economic dependence of the new states on former colonial powers meant that some forms of upwards accountability continued).

The unique historical development of the post-colonial state in Africa has major implications for the inter-relationship between the state and civil society in Africa. The Western liberal notion of civil society as a distinct associational arena whose primary role is to limit the power of the state is not appropriate in situations in which the state, far from being monolithic and overbearing, is in serious decay. While this has been applicable to Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union where civil society played a critical role in confronting totalitarian states, it cannot be translated to Africa. Strengthening organisations within civil society in such a context, cannot be done without an understanding of how they relate to the state and how such means of support will affect the position of the state.

It will be clear that there are no simple or generalisable explanations about the nature of civil society in Africa. Each context requires an analysis of the relations both between civil society and the state and within civil society itself. Civil society is a contested, changing social domain which requires a dynamic analysis of the way in which power is constructed and exercised and relates to the state. This analysis is further complicated by the fact that the

legitimacy of the nation-state is contested in much of Africa, as the number of civil wars across the continent bear witness.

This analysis of civil society and the state poses a major challenge to NGOs. While they may be regarded by aid donors as the most prominent group within civil society in Africa, in fact they constitute only a small group of formal, professional organisations within a vast array of other types of organisation, both traditional and modern. The fact that NGOs are part of civil society cannot be taken as an indication that they are progressive agents of democratisation. NGOs, like other groups in civil society, have diverse and possibly conflicting roles and it is difficult to generalise about their impact on society. They also need to recognise that support for particular groups within civil society will change the power relations between these and other groups within civil society. Moreover, due to the huge resources that NGOs can generate from international sources, they need to consider how they can work constructively with governments rather than simply bypassing them. Undermining government structures will not bring about either sustainable development or democratic governance. This relationship between NGOs engaged in development and government in Africa is examined in the next chapter, along with the role played by official aid donors.

## Chapter 2

### NGOs and the State

#### The Crisis of State in Africa and the Rise of NGOs

By the mid-1990s, thirty years after the wave of Independence across Sub-Saharan Africa, most African states had suffered a period of crisis in both capacity and legitimacy. The period of expansion and optimism of the 1960s and 1970s, when the state was seen by both nationalists and donors alike as the central mechanism for economic and social development, has given way to a period of decline in the 1980s and 1990s. Although the reasons for this crisis are complex and multifaceted, including both internal and external pressures, undoubtedly the structural adjustment programmes promoted by donors from the early 1980s have had a major impact throughout Africa. Structural adjustment, especially as promoted by the IMF and World Bank, made future loans conditional on governments reducing levels of public expenditure and reducing government intervention in the economy. This came at a time of economic crisis during which many countries were faced with stagnant economies and increasing national debt. These structural adjustment programmes have had profound effects on the ability of the state to deliver basic services. Government expenditure has been severely cut and the poor have been hit hardest, with government health, education, agricultural and water supply programmes unable to supply adequate levels of provision.

From this vacuum created by the contraction of the state, NGOs have emerged as major service providers in Africa. They are not new to Africa but what has changed is the scale of their operations – they have grown enormously both in number and in the size of programmes undertaken. Although NGOs have since colonial times played a role in service provision in Africa – for example Christian missions provided extensive health and education programmes during the colonial era – in the post-Independence period many states set up national health, education and agricultural development programmes and NGOs were more peripheral players. In some countries, schools and hospitals run by the missions were nationalised and restrictions were placed on the activities of NGOs. However, since the late 1980s, in many countries where the ability of the state to deliver has declined dramatically, NGOs have taken over many of the activities previously administered by government.

Furthermore, many donors have increasingly directed funding towards NGOs rather than government. The neo-liberal policies promoted by the World Bank, IMF and some bilateral donors, such as the US and UK governments, during this period established an ideological preference for NGOs acting as private contractors for delivering aid. They were heralded as more efficient, less corrupt and closer to the people than government organisations.

NGOs have also benefited from the good governance agenda. Initially this focused on the reform of the formal institutions of government through the application of political conditionality. Aid was made conditional on governments holding multiparty elections, reforming state bureaucracies and ending human rights violations. While this did lead to some positive reforms, there was an increasing recognition that democracy also needed a strong

civil society in order to articulate popular demand and make governments more accountable to their citizens (Clayton 1996). In practice, these policy objectives have largely been implemented through increasing funding for NGOs and decreasing support to the public sector.

This has had two major effects. First, government capacity has been further eroded and weakened through the redirection of funds from government towards NGOs. Secondly, NGOs, both national and international, have had an increasing role in national development. What is common to this process is that the activities of many NGOs, while often praiseworthy in themselves, have been done independently of any reference to government policies or programmes. Little attempt has been made by NGOs to co-ordinate their activities with government policy or with each other.

### *Country Example – The Case of Tanzania*

In order to illustrate these general trends, a brief country case study is provided from Tanzania. Tanzania has undergone a dramatic transformation in the late 1980s and early 1990s which has been characterised by both economic and political liberalisation. The country has moved from a one-party state and a state-controlled economy to multiparty elections and a market economy. It is argued here that this transformation has been less a result of demands from civil society but more due to a weakening of the Tanzanian state as a result of donor policies and a stagnant economy.

The acceptance of the IMF's structural adjustment programme in 1986 has been the key factor in bringing about economic liberalisation in Tanzania. In the early 1980s, the Tanzanian government had resisted IMF/World Bank conditions for financial assistance which included devaluation, reduction or removal of subsidies and import liberalisation. Tanzania launched its own economic recovery programme instead but the economic crisis continued. The government eventually agreed to the IMF structural adjustment programme in 1986. There have been three main phases to this programme (Gibbon 1995). The first, the 'Economic Recovery Plan' ran from 1986 to 1989 and focused primarily on liberalising the economy, including major currency devaluation. The second, the 'Economic and Social Action Programme', which ran from 1989 to 1992, concentrated on deregulation of foreign investment. The third, the 'Rolling Plan and Forward Budget' begun in 1993, has mainly been concerned with reform of the civil service and the parastatal sector. This has involved reducing the size of the government bureaucracy and selling off or closing down parastatals.

In 1990 major political reform took place when the ruling party, Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), began discussions about ending the one-party state and allowing multiparty elections. Nyerere himself advocated an end to one-party rule. He argued that first, CCM leaders had lost touch with the people and political competition would require them to work harder to build up support at the local level. Secondly, he argued that one of his main reasons for favouring one-party rule – the building of national unity and identity – had largely been achieved and the country was now politically mature enough for multipartyism. A national committee was set up which in 1992, following a nationwide review, recommended that multipartyism be permitted in Tanzania. As a result, a large number of opposition parties and independent newspapers were set up. Multiparty elections were first held in 1995 in which the CCM won by a large majority.

There has been a proliferation of non-governmental development organisations in Tanzania since the late 1980s. This represents a major change from the first two and a half decades after Independence in which NGOs did not play a significant role in Tanzanian society. It is important to understand why this transformation took place. Does it represent a new development with civil society in the direction of democracy and pluralism? Or is it a reflection of the privatisation promoted by structural adjustment?

During the colonial period, missionary organisations played a key role in the provision of health and education services. This was especially so in rural areas; those services provided by the government tended to be concentrated in the main urban areas. In 1934 for example, there were only 84 government schools in the country compared with 2,668 mission schools (Ishumi 1995:155). There were a small number of secular NGOs as well, most of which were Tanzanian chapters of British NGOs, such as the Tanzanian Society for the Blind and Tanzania Girl Guides Association. The only locally initiated NGO was the Tanganyika Farmers' Association, although even this had formerly been a branch of the Kenya Farmers' Association (Kiondo 1993:164).

The activities of voluntary organisations in development work was drastically reduced after Independence when Tanzania became a one-party socialist state. Although NGOs were not prohibited from operating by the government after Independence, the state did not regard them as having an important role in the development of Tanzania. Rather, the state itself took sole responsibility for the development of the country. In the post-Independence period, it took over many of the health and education facilities from the missions. This extended in particular to primary education for which all schools were nationalised. However, in most cases the handover was a negotiated process between individual missionary organisations and the government, rather than a total takeover by the state. Some missions handed over hospitals, health centres and secondary schools to the national government, others retained control. While the government did not encourage or support service provision outside the state, it was not forbidden.

The Tanzanian state was very successful in mobilising funds from international donors for its development activities. In the 1970s it received one of the highest amounts of official development assistance for any country in Africa. Nyerere's brand of African socialism, known as Ujamaa in Swahili, was seen as a bold initiative and alternative to both capitalist and communist ideologies and was strongly supported financially by many social democratic governments in Europe, especially the Scandinavian countries. Also, its non-aligned status allowed it to mobilise support from both Western donors and communist countries.

The combination of popular appeal and international backing enabled the Tanzanian state to occupy the space that in other countries was filled by NGOs. This was not done through repressive legislation but primarily through mobilising support both nationally and internationally for its policy of taking responsibility for socio-economic development.

The growth of NGOs in the late 1980s came about because of the failure of the state to continue to occupy this space rather than any popular campaign for greater pluralism (Tripp 1992). By the late 1970s the economy of Tanzania was in decline and the state was finding it increasingly difficult to fulfil its responsibilities. Furthermore, the structural adjustment programme implemented in the mid-1980s required a severe cutback in public sector

expenditure. This dramatically reduced the ability of the state to provide basic services such as health and education at the local level. This problem was compounded by the fact that at this time donors increasingly turned to NGOs as delivery agents rather than to governments. In a reversal of the situation in Tanzania in the 1970s, NGOs were more able to mobilise donor funds than were government departments.

### **The New Public Management and Beyond**

The public sector reforms of the 1980s and 1990s in both developed and developing countries, driven by the neo-liberal policies on privatisation and reduction in the role of the state, have been termed the New Public Management (NPM). The main thrust of NPM has been to reduce high levels of public expenditure, increase the efficiency of public service provision, increase the role of the private sector in public service provision through contracting out, and reform state bureaucracies by introducing executive agencies, internal competition and performance-related pay. NPM emerged initially in the USA and the UK and has probably been taken furthest in New Zealand. However, more recently it has been increasingly promoted by donors in developing countries as solutions to poor performance in the public sector (Turner and Hulme 1997:230-5).

While NPM may appear to offer new opportunities for NGOs to be contracted to undertake service provision on behalf of the government, it has serious limitations which NGOs need to recognise. There have been a number of general criticisms of NPM. Perhaps of most concern for NGOs is that NPM can lead to social exclusion in that those most in need of help – the weak and marginalised members of society – do not receive adequate levels of support, and that a managerial elite is established which is increasingly distanced from both the users and the providers of services (Mackintosh 1997). It can also lead to a fragmented service in which there is no consistent policy and the users are unclear as to who is responsible for provision. Furthermore, NPM focus on efficiency can lead to short-term goals of improved efficiency while ignoring longer-term social and human resource development. Finally, it can be politically destabilising by undermining key state functions (Turner and Hulme 1997:234).

Even the World Bank, which has been a key advocate of NPM, now recognises that great caution is needed in its application in developing countries. Its critique of NPM is based largely on a recognition that NPM requires strong institutional capacity which most developing countries lack.

. . . what is feasible in New Zealand may be unworkable in many developing countries. It takes considerable capability and commitment to write and enforce contracts, especially for difficult-to-specify outputs in social services . . . countries with little capacity to enforce complex contracts, and weak bureaucratic controls to restrain arbitrary behaviour under more flexible management regimes, need to proceed with caution. (World Bank 1997:87)

The *World Development Report 1997* represents a major shift in the World Bank's thinking about the role of the state in development. After over a decade of World Bank criticism of the state, the 1997 report admits that the Bank and other donors have gone too far in promoting a model of the minimalist state throughout the developing world. This has led to a fundamental crisis in the effectiveness of the state, threatening social welfare, economic development and

political stability. It states that, 'State-dominated development has failed, but so will stateless development. Development without an effective state is impossible' (World Bank 1997: 25).

The report sets out an agenda for public sector strengthening and reform in order to make the state more effective. By effective it means, first and foremost, that states get the fundamental, basic tasks of government right, these being a foundation of law; a benign policy environment, including macroeconomic stability; investment in people and infrastructure; protection of the vulnerable; and protection of the natural environment. Through performing these basic tasks states can provide an enabling environment for economic and social development, in which both the private and voluntary sectors would play vital roles.

The report recommends a two-part strategy for improving the effectiveness of government. First, and more immediately, states need to match their role to their capability and not take on too many responsibilities for which they have insufficient resources and expertise to cope with. States need to focus on getting the fundamental tasks of government right. Secondly, and more gradually, the capability of a state can be improved and developed through reinvigorating public institutions. This means designing effective rules and restraints to check arbitrary state actions and corruption; subjecting state institutions to greater competition to ensure greater efficiency; improving the performance of state institutions; and making the state more responsive to people's needs through broader participation and decentralisation. Thus while previous World Bank policy advocated an increased role for the market as the key solution to state failure, the Bank now recognises the limits of the private sector and advocates improving the capacity of government rather than reducing its role.

The shift in thinking about the role of the state is echoed in the *White Paper on International Development* prepared by the British government in November 1997.

There have been two flaws in models of development over the past half-century. The first was characterised by a belief that the State should extend its control over production and trading activities, and over the allocation of resources and prices, in a way which created distortions and led to inefficiency and corruption. The second was a belief in a minimalist State and unregulated market forces which failed to secure economic growth and led to increases in inequality across the world.

There is now an opportunity to create a new synthesis which builds on the role of the State in facilitating economic growth and benefiting the poor. Both States and markets make good servants but poor masters. We have learned that the virtuous State has a key role to play in supporting economic arrangements which encourage human development, stimulate enterprise and saving and create the environment necessary to mobilise domestic resources and to attract foreign investment. (p. 12)

According to the White Paper, the target of poverty eradication cannot be achieved without the support of the national government. Thus the priority for the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID) has now been restated as building partnerships with governments in developing countries in order to develop national strategies, programmes and expertise for tackling poverty.

In the light of these recent policy statements by donor agencies, NGOs ought to rethink their relationship with the state. They can no longer depend on huge amounts of donor funding to

undertake large programmes with little regard to what the state is doing. Much of the growth of NGOs in the late 1980s and early 1990s has been as a direct result of being favoured by donor policy as the best means of aid delivery. This is no longer the case, and in order to maintain their influence and distinctive contribution to development NGOs should develop clearer policies about how to engage with the state. The options are explored in the following two sections.

## **NGOs and Public Service Provision**

In thinking about partnership between the state and NGOs it is important to identify the roles and responsibilities of each; collaboration needs to draw on their respective strengths. NGOs in particular need to recognise their limitations and not seek to take over functions that are better done by government. In particular, only states can provide an overall policy framework, and it is their responsibility to ensure greater co-ordination between all service providers, including NGOs. NGOs are notoriously bad at co-ordinating among themselves, and a NPM environment of competition for public service contracts is hardly conducive to greater co-ordination. This applies also to co-ordination of regional efforts to ensure that poorer or remoter areas are adequately provided for. National level co-ordination is necessary to ensure that NGO inputs are appropriately spread across the country.

The differing roles of the state and NGOs in service provision are analysed in a recent report by Robinson and White (1997). This is based on an extensive review of documentation of NGO service provision in the South. They argue that while NGOs (or civic organisations, which is the actual term they use) play an important role, especially where state provision is weak and the private sector caters for the better off, there are a number of common deficiencies with the services provided by the voluntary sector. These include: limited coverage; variable quality; amateurish approach; high staff turnover; lack of effective management systems; poor cost effectiveness; lack of co-ordination; and poor sustainability due to dependence on external assistance. More generally, what NGOs are unable to do is to provide an overall framework in which to operate at both national and regional levels. This can only be done by the state.

A recent study of NGOs in health care has reinforced these conclusions. Green and Matthius (1997) challenge what they regard as the accepted wisdom that NGOs have a comparative advantage over the state in health provision. They argue that while some NGOs may have a comparative advantage as individual NGOs, this does not mean that this applies to the NGO sector as a whole. There are many shortcomings of the NGOs sector in health care, of which the greatest is the fact that they are unable to provide clear health policy and regulation. These are the responsibility of the state. They argue that in the context of increasing privatisation of health care, whether by the voluntary or commercial sector, it is imperative that the state provides an overall framework which contains a clear policy on the role of NGOs in health provision.

Robinson and White go on to argue that not only can the state and NGOs complement each other but that 'synergy' can be constructed through developing effective working relationships between them. The key to this is the idea of a partnership based on utilising the respective strengths and responsibilities of each party to ensure better service provision. Examples of this include state funding for NGO health services – such as in India where the government

supports NGOs with grants for treatment of indigenous peoples, or in Botswana where the government covers most of the recurrent costs of NGO health facilities – and the state contacting NGOs to implement government-funded community water supply programmes as has taken place in Bolivia. The state needs to ensure that a coherent policy framework is in place and that it should provide most of the funding. NGOs, on the other hand, can bring creativity, innovation and strong community links which can play a ‘catalytic’ role in improving the delivery of services. They also need to be involved in the policy-making process itself. Developing such relationships depends on a complex range of factors and ought to be a strategic long-term priority for governments, NGOs and donors.

### **NGOs and Project Implementation**

This does raise the question of whether such forms of collaboration will lead to a loss of independence by NGOs and compromise their position as advocates on behalf of the poor and marginalised. Will collaboration with the government distance them from their claimed constituency and reduce the political impact of NGOs? While this can be a danger the situation is more complex.

Many NGOs concerned with advocacy and policy influence fail to recognise the importance of political influence in policy implementation and are preoccupied with advocacy at the level of central policy formulation. This represents a misunderstanding of how implementation operates. Administration and policy implementation are highly political processes. As is argued below, centrally formulated policies are not simply implemented in an uncontested, neutral manner. By focusing on policy formulation, NGOs can overlook the opportunity for influencing policy implementation at the local level. The argument here is that NGOs can still have political influence at the level of implementation, and furthermore, that many NGOs are, in fact, better placed to influence government policy at the level of implementation rather than at the level of formulation.

Central to this argument is a rejection of the dichotomy between administration on the one hand and politics on the other, and the myth that politicians make policy and bureaucrats simply implement it.

Administration, management and policy making are highly political activities which involve conflict, bargaining, coercion and coalition-building among groups and individuals both inside and outside the formal organisations. Both macro and micro political processes are central concerns in the practice and analysis of development administration. (Turner and Hulme 1997:21)

Turner and Hulme draw heavily on Grindle’s (1980) study of the politics of implementation in developing countries where she notes that ‘the implementation process is especially central to politics’. She found that unlike in developed countries, where political interests focus mainly on the policy-making stage, in developing countries most contestation takes place at the implementation stage. It is during the implementation process that different interest groups are most demanding of the bureaucracy on its allocation of resources. Furthermore, such political processes may be dominated by factional politics, patron–client relationships and local elites. Thus, even when sound policies are formulated at the centre, their actual implementation can be manipulated by different interest groups.

This is a critical issue for NGOs. Most NGOs are involved in project work in rural areas. Their main engagement with the state is primarily through frequent, day-to-day contacts with decentralised government bodies during the implementation of projects. Yet few regard this as an opportunity for political involvement and many NGOs make the distinction between so-called political activity – advocacy, civic education, etc. – and the administration of projects. The latter activity is often seen as routine with little chance to influence the government. Yet it is precisely at this level of implementing projects that key political contests over the allocation of resources take place.

An assertion of the political effectiveness of NGO project work has been made by Charlton and May (1995). They argue that rather than seeing NGO project work as a purely economic or managerial function, it needs to be seen as a political phenomena in itself which has the potential to be part of the democratisation process. Like Grindle, and Turner and Hulme, they argue that the implementation of development projects is where major political struggles over resource allocation take place, rather than at the policy formulation stage. Furthermore, there are more opportunities to foster civic participation in decision-making over implementation than in policy formulation. For the majority of people, policy-making processes are seen as remote, inaccessible and irrelevant to their lives; and the mechanisms for representing the interests of the poor in such processes are weak. It is for this reason that many NGOs regard advocacy work at the policy level as a major responsibility. This is contrasted with project work which is not thought to be an activity in which they can exert political influence. Yet it is precisely at the interface between people and decentralised state bodies at the implementation level that NGOs and other organisations within civil society are needed to represent the interests of the poor and facilitate their participation in decision-making.

This has implications for the current concern with strengthening democracy in developing countries. Charlton and May go on to argue that democratisation in many developing countries has tended to focus at the level of multiparty elections rather than the less formalised political processes by which resources are allocated. Here they think that NGOs can exert a positive influence both through collaboration with government and by setting examples of probity and equity in their own project implementation. They argue that for NGOs,

This involves focusing less on the processes and structures of policy formulation that, inevitably, remain remote from the experiences of the mass of the population and concentrating more on how centrally defined and formulated policies and programmes are applied and administered as local projects or are delivered as services. (1995: 243)

It is because implementation is such a highly political process that NGOs are needed in order to use their influence to ensure that the poor and marginalised are not excluded from local decision-making processes. If NGOs were to neglect project level work in favour of advocacy at the central policy formulation level they could miss a crucial opportunity for leverage on the actual outcomes of policy. It is through engagement with the state at the level of implementation – whether this be through collaboration in service provision, involvement in district development committees, or lobbying on behalf of the poor to local decision makers on resource allocation – that NGOs can have a direct influence beyond the direct material outputs of their own projects.

This calls for some NGOs to rethink the distinction between advocacy and project work. As has been argued here, project work is a political activity because it involves decisions over allocation of resources. Collaboration with government in service provision, rather than being seen only in terms of co-option by the state and political acquiescence, can be seen as an opportunity for political influence through seeking to improve the administration of public services. Democratic governance is not just about multiparty elections but about the efficient, honest and equitable administration in the public sector. If NGOs can act as ‘catalysts’ for improved public sector management through engagement with the state at the level of implementation then they are playing an important political role. The key question for individual NGOs is to ask themselves where they are likely to have the most influence, and build on their individual strengths. While there is a need for specialist NGOs with a distinctive advocacy role at the national level, for whom undertaking project work would be a distraction, there are many NGOs whose experience, expertise and influence lies in local level service provision and such activities do not need to be any less political than central level advocacy. The NGO sector as a whole needs to ensure that both approaches are utilised.

The recognition that NGOs can have political influence at the level of implementation can also provide strategic options for NGOs concerned with advocacy work. This is especially the case when the political space for national advocacy work at the policy level is restricted. When the political conditions make it difficult for NGOs to undertake national level advocacy work, with threats of expulsion or de-registration by governments, engagement in local level advocacy on behalf of poor and marginalised groups through involvement in projects may not be regarded with the same hostility. Government policy on NGOs may itself make a distinction between ‘political’ involvement and ‘service provision’, forbidding the former but permitting the latter. Despite such restrictions, NGOs can still make use of the space for service provision work to undertake advocacy, even when higher-profile campaigns at the policy level may be difficult.

In both Kenya and Tanzania, for example, while NGOs are encouraged to collaborate with the government in service provision, the government has been critical of NGOs that have undertaken high-profile advocacy campaigns against government policy. This is clearly reflected in the new NGO policy in Tanzania which has been proposed by the government. While the main purpose of the new policy is to improve and unify legislation covering NGOs, it also reflects current government perceptions of the role of NGOs in development. The policy reflects a major shift in the government’s view of NGOs from the previous ‘Ujamaa’ era. Previously, as stated above, the government view was that NGOs were not necessary because the government itself would provide all the required services at the grass roots. In the new policy, it states that the government now sees NGOs as partners with a significant role to play in the development of the country. However, what is also clear from the policy is that the government values NGOs as private service providers, bringing much needed resources and expertise to support the government’s development efforts. The government is less enthusiastic about NGOs taking on a more political, advocacy role. The policy states that:

Although the Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania, provides for the right of freedom of speech and association, NGOs as legal entities are restricted from engaging in any activity that will be construed to be political in nature i.e. align themselves directly with political parties activities. These are not permissible. However, this rule do (*sic*) not restrict NGOs to engage in public debate on development issues. (National Policy on NGOs in Tanzania, 2nd Draft, 1997)

The message of the new policy is clear: NGOs have an important role as government partners in service provision, but they should keep clear of taking on an advocacy role which might lead them to criticise government policy and practice. Thus, on the one hand NGOs are welcomed, but on the other hand they are told to keep clear of politics. There are cases of NGOs being de-registered by the government because they are seen as too political. Thus although there is now more room for NGOs in Tanzania, it is a restricted space in which their role is seen primarily as private service providers to complement government activities. However, despite these stated restrictions, NGOs have undertaken successful advocacy campaigns in Tanzania. The space for advocacy has not been completely closed. Mbogori's (1997) report on NGOs and advocacy work in Tanzania notes three particular examples here: the campaign against domestic violence by the Tanzania Women's Media Association (TAMWA); a campaign on land rights by Hakiardhi; and the campaign for gender equity in budgetary allocations by the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP). Mbogori notes that 'the clear impression that emerges here is that some issues are not as safe as others for advocacy work'.

This indicates the need for the NGO sector in Tanzania, as elsewhere, to adopt multiple strategies towards advocacy. The key question is where will they have most leverage with the government. For some this may mean taking a confrontational role in order to influence national policy; but for others, the greatest means of leverage with government is through working at the local level in service provision. While they may not be able to improve government policy and practice at a national level, they may have the potential to improve local governance through working with decentralised government agencies in the management of local services. The interaction between NGOs and the state in implementation takes place mainly through decentralised government organisations. For it is the government bodies at the local level – whether these be field offices of sectoral ministries, central government appointees at the district level, or local devolved authorities – that have primary responsibility for the implementation of centrally formulated policies in the form of projects and programmes. It is for this reason that NGOs need to consider how to work with decentralised government, not just as contractors, but in order to make government more responsive to people's needs and better able to fulfil them.

# Chapter 3

## Decentralisation in Africa

### Forms of Decentralisation

Decentralisation is a broad term referring to the transfer of political authority from the centre to the local level. In order for NGOs to engage strategically with decentralised government, rather than in an *ad hoc* manner as is commonly the case, they need to recognise the specific roles and authority of different government bodies at the district level and below, and how these to relate to central government on the one hand and local civil society on the other. Only then can they identify the institutional channels by which NGOs can engage with government at the sub-national level. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of different types of decentralisation in Africa.

Decentralisation has taken many different forms in Africa (Tordoff 1994). However, it is possible to identify two major types of decentralisation; administrative deconcentration and political devolution. Each country has its own unique combination of central and local government powers and in practice decentralisation may involve a combination of both.

Deconcentration occurs when the authority to make decisions is shifted outwards from the centre of government to bureaucrats located at the sub-national level. It is essentially an administrative process relating to the internal structure of decision-making within the bureaucracy. A decentralisation policy based on administrative deconcentration would, for example, mean that a district commissioner is authorised to take greater responsibility for decision-making without having to refer to senior officials located at the capital. The main advantages of administrative deconcentration are to make the bureaucratic process more efficient and the fact that in principle officials based at the local level are more likely to have a better understanding of local issues. Deconcentration does not increase political accountability at the local level.

There are various forms of deconcentration. One key issue concerns the authority and co-ordination between different line ministries. Most line ministries, such as agriculture or education, have some form of sub-national organisation but these are not necessarily directly related to sub-divisions within the administration. For example, administrative districts and agricultural districts may not have the same boundaries, as is the case in Botswana (Clayton 1995). Authority over field officers of line ministries may lie within the line ministry or be held by the district commissioner, or there may be a combination of both. Many countries have district development committees whose purpose is to co-ordinate the initiatives of various ministries.

Devolution by contrast, refers to the transfer of central government authority to a form of representative local government body which maintains some degree of legal autonomy from central government. The local government body is made up of representatives who have the authority to make decisions on various public matters. District councils and town councils, made up of elected councillors, are the most common form of devolved local government.

While most countries have some form of elected local government, the authority and capacity of such bodies is often very limited. As Smith (1985:7) points out, it is important to distinguish between the existence of an elected local body on the one hand and the powers delegated to them by the centre on the other. He contrasts a situation of 'maximum participation with minimum delegation' – elected bodies with no powers – with one of 'minimum participation with maximum delegation' – field agents of central government with extensive powers.

Even if representative local government is ostensibly supported by central government, its accountability to the electorate may be compromised by other factors. Devolution means central government relinquishing power over certain areas of responsibility to local government. However, although official policy may promote devolution and lead to the establishment or strengthening of local government institutions, the experience from Africa and elsewhere is that in practice usually less power is devolved than originally envisaged. There are number of ways by which central government restrict the independence of local governments and in doing so retains power over them. Haque (1997) has distinguished four main areas in which local government is dependent on central government. First, local governments are rarely given the resources to carry out the responsibilities assigned them, which makes them economically dependent on central government. Secondly, the centralisation of administrative decision-making processes and the lack of skilled personnel at local government level makes the latter administratively dependent on central government bureaucrats. Thirdly, in many developing countries, local governments are politically dependent on ruling parties which weaken their accountability to local constituents. Finally, in countries where most local services are supplied through field offices of sectoral ministries rather than through local government, local government is dependent on central government for key decisions over resource allocation at the local level.

While many local authorities have elected representatives, the extent to which they are accountable to their constituents may be insignificant. In many countries, local authorities are usually more accountable to central government through political and fiscal control, than they are to the electorate. Also, local representatives may be drawn from the local elite and relationships of patronage may dominate the election process. The issue of accountability is discussed further in Chapter 5 below.

The model favoured by most African post-colonial states has been administrative deconcentration. Often this has been at the expense of representative local government. For example, the decentralisation programme in Tanzania in 1972 was one of administrative concentration in which elected district councils were actually abolished. In Tanzania, as elsewhere, administrative deconcentration rather than political devolution has been justified on the grounds that this will ensure greater uniformity of governance across the country and reduce ethnic or regional divisiveness (Smith 1985:9). Another justification for deconcentration is that it is seen as more efficient and prevents public funds from being squandered – an indication of a lack of confidence in local councillors.

However, since the widespread move towards political liberalisation that began in the late 1980s there has been an increased emphasis on political devolution in Africa (Tordoff 1994, Crook and Jerve 1991, Manor 1995). Yet despite the current rhetoric on devolution, there are a number of major obstacles which reflect political and economic realities in much of Africa.

First, inadequate staffing levels and standards of local government officers have been a major constraint on local authorities. Morale has often been low and work with central government ministries has been more attractive (Tordoff 1994). Secondly, central government financial transfers are essential for local government which inevitably limits their autonomy. This reflects not only the difficulty that local governments have in raising sufficient revenue directly themselves but also the role of central government in compensating for the wide disparity in wealth across different districts within a country. Thirdly, there is the issue of encouraging greater autonomy for local government in a country in which national unity is seen as under threat by ethnic and regional tensions.

Different countries in Africa have pursued various combinations of deconcentration and devolution. Examples are provided from Uganda, Botswana and Tanzania which represent different types of decentralisation. Uganda has pushed through one of the most comprehensive programmes of devolving power to local councils in Africa. In Tanzania, by contrast, decentralisation has been primarily in terms of deconcentration and, until recently, there was tight central control of all sub-national levels of government. A post-Independence priority in Tanzania was to create a united country committed to the Ujamaa policies; strong, independent local authorities were seen as a threat to this. Botswana is a country in which there is a mixture of both deconcentration, through the district administration, and devolution, through the district councils and land boards.

## **Uganda**

For more than a decade, Uganda has been developing one of the most radical programmes of devolution in Africa. It has resulted in a major reform of the public sector away from central government control to that of empowering district councils, which are made up of elected representatives. The foundation for decentralisation began during the civil war in Uganda, which took place between 1981 and 1986. During this period the National Resistance Movement (NRM) established resistance councils (RCs) in the areas they had liberated. The RCs were elected peoples' councils charged with governing the areas under their jurisdiction, and replaced the former local government system which had been highly centralised. The RCs operated on a tiered system, the smallest being the ward or neighbourhood level and going through to the district level (Kisakye 1996).

When the NRM came to power in 1986 it extended the RCs from village to district levels throughout the country. Their position as the foundation of the local government system was formalised in 1987 and they were given wide ranging powers. Since 1986, the NRM government has been pushing through various stages of a long-term process of decentralisation. Decentralisation was a major theme in the new Constitution of 1995 and the 1997 Local Government Act was enacted in order to bring about the provisions made in the Constitution (Government of Uganda 1997).

Key features of decentralisation in Uganda are the devolution of responsibility for political, administrative and financial decision-making (Villadsen 1996). Firstly, the political head of the district is the Chairman of the District Council. This is an elected representative whereas previously it was the District Administrator, a central government appointee, who was the head of the district. Secondly, an integrated local government administration has been established, headed by a Chief Administrative Officer, which gives the District Council

overall responsibility for the administration of services in the district. Staff from different line ministries working in the district are now accountable firstly to the district council, not their central ministries. Similarly, district development planning is now the responsibility of the district council, and the district development committees which previously co-ordinated district planning has been abolished.

Thirdly, the Ugandan Government has been concerned that control over finances should also be decentralised. It has recognised that, while local authorities will continue to be dependent on financial transfers from central government, it is necessary to ensure that local autonomy is not undermined. In order to do this, the government set up a system whereby every district council receives an unconditional block grant to cover recurrent expenditure and to run decentralised services. Good progress has been made but by the end of 1997 only some 20% of recurrent expenditure or 2% of GDP had been placed under the control of local governments. The government now wants to extend this decentralisation to development funds and is investigating how can development funds be transferred to local authorities to be used according to their own priorities rather than those of central ministries (Government of Uganda 1997). Initially only about one-third of development expenditure is being decentralised. The main problem which the government faces is to develop financial and managerial capacity at the district level.

## **Botswana**

Decentralisation in Botswana has been characterised by deconcentration of power from central government to the district administration and field officers of central ministries, with limited decision-making powers devolved to elected local authorities (Egner 1986; Reilly and Tordoff 1991). After Independence in 1966, the district councils were established and assumed control over many of the responsibilities of the district commissioners and the traditional authorities. However, within a few years the central government became disillusioned with the inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the councils (Reilly and Tordoff 1991). In addition, following the 1969 local elections in which the opposition parties made significant gains at the expense of the ruling Botswana Democratic Party, the government was also concerned not to let district or town councils become centres of opposition (Gasper 1990). The district administration was subsequently strengthened at the expense of the councils (Egner 1986). For example, the district development committees, which were established in 1971, were placed under the chairmanship of the district commissioner, not the council secretary. The district administration has continued to be strengthened *vis-à-vis* the councils.

Although the capacity of councils to implement programmes has expanded enormously since they were established, decision-making power has largely remained with central government. Councils have little freedom to act independently in financial management, revenue control and personnel management (Karlsson et al. 1993). Recruitment of council staff was taken over by central government in 1974 with the establishment of the Unified Local Government Service and the Unified Teaching Service. Although this improved the career structure of council staff, it created problems of political accountability. Councillors, who are responsible to the electorate for the actions of council staff, do not feel that they have sufficient authority over them. Proposals by the Local Government Structure Commission in 1979 to set up a statutory body with ultimate responsibility for all local authority staff, comprising

representatives of the Ministry of Local Government, Lands and Housing (MLGLH), local authorities and independent members, have not been implemented (Egner 1986).

The most powerful form of control that central government exercises over councils is financial. Councils have a weak revenue base and are dependent on transfers from central government. Civil servants in the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (MFDP) and MLGLH make the key decisions about the level of funding which each council is to receive. Central government has discretionary powers to hold up or reduce disbursements of funds to councils after each council's annual development budget has been agreed. Councils have not been able to decide on how and when resources are to be used but have been subject to decisions made for them by central government (Danevad 1993:122; Egner 1986: 87-92). A further means of central government dominance of local authorities is in that the Minister of Local Government, Lands and Housing retains the right to nominate an unlimited number of councillors in addition to the elected representatives. This has been used in the past to tip the balance of power in favour of the ruling party (Healey 1995b:17). This minister also has the power to nominate additional members of the land board which are elected bodies responsible for allocation of land in Botswana (Clayton 1995).

## **Tanzania**

In Tanzania, various attempts have been made at decentralisation since Independence but they have all been in terms of administrative deconcentration rather than political devolution. Although the official rhetoric behind local government reform was in terms of giving more power to local people, in reality local government reform increased the authority of regional and district level bureaucrats (Max 1991 and Mawhood 1991). The priority of the ruling party, CCM, was to ensure that the state penetrated all levels of Tanzanian society and independent local government was seen as an obstacle to this process.

In 1972 the district councils that the Tanzanian government inherited from the colonial era were abolished. In their place power was transferred to civil servants – regional and district development directors and their staffs – who were representatives of the central government at a local level. However, in 1982, elected urban and rural councils were re-established, and at the sub-district level the former ward development committees were revived. Although the reform did present a move in the direction of devolution, this was undermined by the retention of essential features of the 1972 Act in which regional and district civil servants maintained control of key administrative authority (Tordoff 1994). Centralising forces in Tanzania have been very powerful and this has mitigated against the development of strong, devolved local government.

Currently local government is again in a process of major reform. The stated direction of the reform is in transferring more responsibility from the regional and district level bureaucrats to local authorities – the district and urban councils. The institutional framework within which this will take place has still to be worked out, but already the Regional Administration Act 1997 has been passed which has given more power to local authorities (rural and urban councils), leaving a much scaled-down regional level which now has an advisory role.

## Chapter 4

# NGO Experiences of Working with Decentralised Government

The great diversity of decentralisation means that there is a wide range of government bodies or committees that NGOs may usefully work with. In some countries, the major responsibility for sectoral development may lie with district councils, while in others it lies with the district field offices of line ministries. Thus NGO–government collaboration at the district level will take many different forms depending on the structure of decentralised government. Obviously NGOs need to understand these structures and the linkages between institutions in order to decide which government bodies they should seek to work with or support, or not to work with as the case may be. This calls for an analysis of informal as well as formal links between government institutions since the actual relationships between them may be somewhat different to those envisaged in government decentralisation policy. For example, while the district development committee may on paper be the key body for district development planning and for co-ordinating development implementation, in practice it may be a rather ineffective institution which carries little weight with the different line ministries or local authority.

The experiences of NGOs and decentralised government working together have been mixed and not much has been documented. Some NGOs have had very constructive working relationships with decentralised government, as the examples below show. However, these tend to be examples of individual NGOs seeking partnerships with particular decentralised government bodies in order to implement sectoral programmes. There is less evidence of NGOs engaging with decentralised government in any co-ordinated manner to ensure that the NGO sector as a whole is involved in district level (and below) development planning processes. The initiative to collaborate with government is very much left to individual NGOs.

However, while few NGOs appear to have any specific policy on working with decentralised government, the realities of rural service provision is such that most NGOs involved will work intimately with government officers and institutions at the local level whether they like it or not. Even if NGOs do not regard decentralised government agencies as partners with which they should collaborate, they will still have frequent, day-to-day interaction with government. For example, government officers will need to be informed of project activities, which could include field officers of relevant sector ministries, administrators attached to the district council or district commissioner's office and members of any district level committees. Likewise, local leaders and politicians will need to be informed of new activities, and maintaining their goodwill may be critical for the success of the project. NGO staff may also wish to participate in local level meetings, such as district or divisional development committees. In addition to these more formal types of interaction, NGO and government staff are likely to be involved in a whole web of informal relationships with each other. This may be particularly the case in situations where they constitute a small group of outsiders in remote rural areas where they are more likely to interact socially with fellow professionals, whoever they work for, rather than the local population. Such interrelationships, based on what Evans (1996) calls embeddedness (see Chapter 1), could be used to develop more formal types of collaboration between the NGO sector and decentralised government agencies.

Examples which illustrate some of the main issues facing NGOs in collaborating with decentralised government are provided below. The Zimbabwe examples highlights the distinction between individual NGO initiatives and lack of overall policy framework for NGO engagement with decentralised development planning. The next example on the Danish NGO, MS, demonstrates the importance of NGOs themselves having a clear policy on partnership with government. The case study of the WAMMA programme in Tanzania shows how an international NGO, WaterAid, was able to develop a highly productive relationship with various levels of the Tanzania government in the context of a rural water supply programme. This is followed by an example which looks at the relationship between an international NGO and a devolved local council which illustrates how the community empowerment programme promoted by the NGO was seen by the council as a threat to its own political popularity and legitimacy. The final example, again from Zimbabwe, shows how the involvement of an NGO with a district council was through providing technical advice and advocacy, rather than project funding.

### **NGOs and Decentralised Government in Zimbabwe**

The ODI studies of NGO–government collaboration in agricultural development in Zimbabwe show a number of good examples of successful collaborative ventures between individual NGOs and decentralised government (Wellard and Copestake 1993). Examples include: the Mutoko Agricultural Development Project which was a joint undertaking of the Mutoko District Council, AGRITEX (the government extension service) and COOIPO, a Belgian NGO (Mvududu 1993); and the Community Management of Indigenous Woodlands Demonstration Project in Chivi and Zvishavane Districts, in which an NGO ENDA worked in close collaboration with district councillors, various governmental agencies and the district development committees (Chaguma and Gumbo 1993). However, such types of collaboration appear to be *ad hoc* and outside any broader policy framework of the government and NGO sector. In particular, formal government planning processes exclude much NGO activity. The decentralised planning system in Zimbabwe is focused on social service provision – health, schools and water supply. Those NGOs that support specific sectoral facilities are included in the decentralised planning process, but those, like ORAP, which are involved in income-generation, and agricultural production are excluded from the formal development process (Ndiweni 1993).

A similar problem in collaboration applies to the health sector in Zimbabwe in which the government also uses a decentralised approach to planning and implementation (Green and Matthias 1997). In the health sector this works on the basis that each level submits a health plan to the level above. The lowest unit is the health facility, and all health facilities in a district prepare a health facility plan which is then submitted to the district health team. The district health team then develops its own district health plan. Following discussions with the district development committee, the plan is submitted through the district health executive to the provincial health team who in turn submit a provincial plan to the Ministry of Health. While this provides opportunities for the exchange of ideas between health workers at different levels in the system, according to Green and Matthias it has ‘inherent weakness with regard to the NGO sector’ (1997:115) They give four main reasons for this.

First, only those NGOs which run health facilities are formally included in the planning process. NGOs which run community health programmes – in health education, sanitation, and working with groups with particular health needs – but which do not involve an actual health facility are excluded. Secondly, of those NGOs which do operate health facilities, many do not have their own health plans and are unable to contribute to the district plan. Thirdly, larger NGOs, especially international NGOs, tend to bypass the district health planning process. Some deal directly with central government, thus undermining the decentralised system. Others deal directly with the district administrator and district development committee on multisector projects, even if such projects have a health component. Thus the district health planning team may be unaware of other health initiatives taking place in the district, limiting its ability to undertake comprehensive district health planning. Finally, there is no obligation for local NGOs to report the funding they receive from international NGOs and donors to the relevant government bodies, making it very difficult for district and provincial health teams to set priorities.

### **MS in Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe**

As well as clear government policy on involving NGOs in district development, the existence of a clear policy of NGOs for collaboration with decentralised government is also important. For example, MS (Danish Association for International Co-operation), one of the largest Danish NGOs, has extensive experience working with decentralised levels of government and many of its country offices recognise government agencies as potential partners. The 1996 policy paper from MS Tanzania states that in addition to its partners within civil society, they will also have ‘cooperation partners among government institutions and organisations’ (p. 23). In Zimbabwe its activities include working with rural district councils on natural resource management, agriculture, and school development and maintenance, and working with the Ministry of Social Welfare on community-based rehabilitation for people with disabilities in Buhera district (*Partner Activities*, MS Zimbabwe 1996). In Zambia, MS has recently revised its approach to partnership, which focused primarily on those within civil society, to include working with government.

In the last year MS-Zambia has felt an increasing need for linking with government structures and development plans. The bottom up development processes MS-Zambia has engaged into will in the future demand a greater cooperation with government structures. (*Annual Report 1996 MS Zambia*)

This has meant supporting government work in selected provinces and districts. MS is now working closely with two district councils, as well as supporting the work of sectoral ministry offices in these districts. Both districts are remote with little NGO activity. It was inspired by the work of the Dutch NGO, SNV, in another district in Zambia in providing help with planning, co-ordination and income-generation. MS is seeking to strengthen development planning and co-ordination in these two districts and is providing a Danish Development Worker, transport and financial assistance. It is also supporting the work of the Provincial Planning Unit in one Luapula Province. These are new initiatives which MS-Zambia sees as long-term capacity-building programmes for district level government.

### **The WAMMA Programme – WaterAid and the Tanzanian Government**

Another example of successful NGO–decentralised government partnership is that of the WAMMA programme, which is a joint initiative between the Tanzanian government and WaterAid (Jarman and Johnson 1997). This has taken place in Dodoma region and has involved collaboration with the district and regional governments. The WAMMA programme is concerned with establishing an integrated, participatory approach to community water supplies. Four multisectoral teams of fieldworkers form the heart of the programme, drawn from junior staff in the three departments – Water, Health and Community Development. These staff have been motivated and trained to work closely with villagers and help them develop appropriate and sustainable water projects. There is a team assigned to each of the four districts in Dodoma region.

The governance structure of the WAMMA programme consists of a regional steering committee, a regional WAMMA support team, district WAMMA committees, and the district WAMMA teams. WaterAid acts in an advisory capacity to each of these committees and teams. The district WAMMA committees consist of the district heads of each of the key departments, the district planning officer and the district education officer. The committee is chaired by the District Executive Director who reports on the programme to the district council. The Regional WAMMA Steering Committee meets every quarter and is chaired by the Regional Administrative Secretary and attended by the regional department heads, the regional planning officer, the regional WAMMA team, the district WAMMA co-ordinators and the WaterAid Country Representative. The purpose of the regional committee is to co-ordinate water provision and donor inputs and set regional policies and budgets.

In terms of funding, the communities, government and WaterAid all contribute. The villagers made cash contributions towards capital costs, while the government provided qualified staff, and annual cash contributions to the programme, some transport and construction equipment. WaterAid paid for all materials, both those procured locally and those imported, vehicles and running costs, field allowances and training for government staff, as well as employing its own staff.

A number of issues have been critical to the success of the partnership. First, in 1991 Tanzania adopted a National Water Policy. This shifted more responsibility for the operation and maintenance of rural water schemes from government to villages. Villages were to set up water committees and collect water funds. This provided an enabling environment for the WAMMA programme which promoted a participatory approach to rural water schemes. Secondly, WaterAid recognised that the attitudes of its own staff to working with government was crucial to the programme’s success. Staff were selected ‘for their ability to work in teams and to devolve power, authority and responsibility to partner staff’ (Jarman and Johnson 1997:11). Thirdly, the partnership required an attitudinal change on the part of the government staff who were not accustomed to participatory approaches to working with villagers. This required time, patience and flexibility on the part of WaterAid.

WaterAid identified a certain number of pre-conditions for productive partnerships between government and NGOs:

Enabling policy climate: Tanzania’s National Water Policy explicitly permits a community-based approach to water supply.

Available fieldworkers: The government made fieldworkers available at district level.

Official backing: At least one senior government official gave the programme continuous support.

Patience and flexibility: Government and NGO/donor were patient and did not push for quick results.

High priority for community development: WaterAid gave community development a high profile and appropriate resources, including staff in its own team experienced in participatory working methods.

Adequate donor resources: WaterAid was willing to sustain the partnership over a long period and at an adequate level.

(Jarman and Johnson 1997:20)

The WaterAid case study illustrates that collaboration with decentralised government bodies can lead to improved public sector projects through facilitating a change towards a more participatory approach. In this case, there has been NGO–government partnership in order to improve community water supplies and health and sanitation. One of the outcomes of this partnership has involved empowering both local communities and government fieldworkers.

### **NGOs and Devolved Local Authorities – Oshakati Human Settlement Improvement Project and IBIS<sup>1</sup>**

Additional issues need to be considered in working with devolved local government authorities. The latter are politically accountable to local citizens and NGOs should be aware of the particular pressures which they may be under. Local authorities may see international NGOs as a threat, due to the fact that they usually have much greater resources for their programmes than local authorities. Large, well-funded NGO projects may upstage local authority initiatives and undermine the legitimacy and credibility of the latter. These problems can be especially acute in countries where devolved councils are relatively new.

A good example of these relationships concerns the Oshakati Human Settlement Improvement Project, in Northern Namibia which was funded by IBIS, a Danish NGO, and ran from 1993 to 1996. The project reflects some interesting issues about the relationship between IBIS and the Oshakati Town Council. The purpose of the project was the physical upgrading of four of Oshakati's informal settlements by empowering local communities to carry out the work. This involved establishing and strengthening community development committees in each of the settlements. The capacity of these CDCs to take on the upgrading work proved successful and the project appeared to be a successful community development project.

However, initially the project failed to consider the position of the Oshakati Town Council (OTC). OTC was itself a very new body – at Independence in Namibia there were no democratically elected councils – and was only just beginning to come to grips with governing the town. This created a major problem in the relationship between the project and

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<sup>1</sup> This case study is based on a review of project documentation and an interview with an IBIS staff member.

OTC. The council felt threatened by the success of the community development committees. They feared that the popularity of the new CDCs would overshadow their own efforts to establish themselves as the local authority for the town. Furthermore, many people from opposition parties were elected onto the CDCs. OTC accused the project of helping to build up opposition political parties in the town by providing a platform for them in the CDCs. The mayor even went on local radio to denounce the project for political interference in the town. OTC feared that OHSIP was setting itself up as an alternative town council. Not only was it seen as harbouring the political opposition to the council but also the budget of the project was much bigger than that of the town councils. The project clearly did not understand initially the vulnerability of OTC. The project was successfully promoting community empowerment while ignoring the fact that the local council was very new, poorly resourced and trying to establish its own legitimacy.

In response, the project revised its approach and began to work more closely with OTC. A three day seminar was held to bring together officials and councillors from OTC with project and IBIS staff. Since then there was a genuine attempt to ensure that the project worked more closely with OTC and regular meetings were held between the project and the council. The project maintained its objective of community empowerment but tried to ensure that this is done on a more collaborative basis with the council. The aim was to make OTC a partner in the project so that it did not see it as a threat to its own position. IBIS revised its role from one of just supporting community organisations to that of acting as an interface between communities and the local council and providing support to both groups.

### **NGOs and Local Level Advocacy – Devolution of Authority for Natural Resource Management in Zimbabwe**

As well as providing project funding, NGOs can also play an advocacy and advisory role with decentralised government. A example of this concerns the implementation of the CAMPFIRE initiative by Beitbridge District Council in Zimbabwe (Metcalf 1996). The first initiative was taken by central government, which passed legislation to grant local communities the authority to manage wildlife resources and set up the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE). The CAMPFIRE initiative recognised that so long as all wildlife was seen as state property, there was little incentive for local communities to manage it. By granting local communities the right to generate income through utilising this resource, it was anticipated that wildlife would be managed more sustainably. The existence of a market in wildlife products (including hunting licences) was also essential for the feasibility of this initiative, ensuring that local communities gained financially from 'ownership' of wildlife.

The key issue was establishing the most appropriate institutional framework to ensure that local communities had control over the management of wildlife and that local elites did not dominate the process of allocating resources. Communal land, and the natural resources on such land, is legally state property in Zimbabwe and state ownership is devolved to the local government authorities, the Rural District Councils. Individual councils were given responsibility for deciding on what extent they should devolve authority for natural resource management to local communities and how any revenue generated should be used. In the case of Beitbridge District Council, a national NGO, the Zimbabwe Trust, played a key role in both advocating on behalf of local communities and providing technical advice as to what

institutional mechanisms could be set up for handling this decentralisation. They advocated successfully for the devolution of responsibility for wildlife management to village committees. A key decision made by the district council was to devolve ownership down to the village level, rather than ward or district level. Each village had a clearly bounded area which it was responsible for managing, and from which only it benefited and each village was also allowed to decide how to divide revenue generated from wildlife.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion: Strengthening Local Governance

In this concluding chapter, the focus shifts from partnership and collaboration to the more fundamental problem of improving local governance, whether that be by deconcentrated bodies, local government or civil society organisations. Four key issues or dilemmas have been identified as critical for improving local governance. They reflect the need for establishing the balance between central government, local government and civil society.

#### Accountability

The accountability of decentralised government bodies depends largely on the type of decentralisation adopted, as was discussed in Chapter 3. An obvious distinction is between an elected council on the one hand, which is accountable to its local constituents, and a deconcentrated district administration on the other, which is directly accountable to central government (Haque 1997). However, the reality is far more complex than this and most decentralised government bodies are subject to multiple accountabilities. Multiple accountabilities mean that an individual or organisation is accountable to a number of different bodies who may have competing claims, thus limiting the ability of the individual or organisation to satisfy each of their demands. Local government, in particular, is accountable both downwards towards local citizens and upwards to various central government bodies, and accountable for both their administrative duties and their political functions.

The problem of multiple accountabilities can be even more pronounced in local government. Notwithstanding their responsibility to the local electorate, local authorities are often enmeshed in a web of accountability relationships with central government bodies. (Polidano and Hulme 1997: 2)

For instance, take the example of a district council in Botswana. Although district councillors are elected by local constituents through the ballot box, there are many relationships of accountability towards central government (Sharma 1997): the Minister of Local Government, Lands and Housing has the authority to nominate additional councillors; council officers, who implement the councillors' policies, are appointed centrally through the Department of Local Government Service Management; local council expenditure is tightly controlled by the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning; there is limited autonomy for decentralised development planning; and much development expenditure is channelled through field offices of line ministries. In making decisions, the council has to consider and balance these multiple, and potentially conflicting, accountabilities.

In addition to the multiple formal channels of accountability, local politicians and administrators are also involved in further relations of accountability. These are based on informal relationships between public officials, politicians and citizens and may be informed, for example, by ethnicity, kinship, religion and patron–clientism. Thus, as Chabal notes, political accountability is 'more broadly, the ensemble of formal and informal factors which impinge on the way in which rulers and ruled relate to each other in a political community'

(1994:54). Relationships of political accountability at the local level may thus vary significantly across a country, despite the fact that the same formal constitutional mechanisms are in place throughout.

The engagement of NGOs within local accountability structures is highly problematic. While the local accountability of decentralised government bodies is variable and compromised by a set of competing accountabilities, the local accountability of NGOs working in local service provision is much weaker and in many cases virtually non-existent. Here it is important to distinguish between international or national NGOs on the one hand, which are assisting third parties, and local, grass roots, membership organisations, such as co-operatives or natural resource user groups on the other hand. The latter type of organisation has strong local accountability, the former type does not. NGOs are first accountable to their boards, who are usually either in the capital or in another country. Secondly, they are accountable to the government of the country in which they work through national registration. This is normally done with the central government and not local government.

If NGOs are not themselves locally accountable, how can they hope to strengthen local democracy? While one option has always been to work in close collaboration with grass roots, membership organisations where they exist, the argument running throughout this report has been that through engaging with the state at the local level, NGOs can become more accountable to local citizens. Given the wave of democratisation that has swept Africa and the renewed focus on devolution in many countries, NGOs can no longer ignore the importance of local government. If local government is locally accountable, and not serving the interests of local elites, then NGOs need to build on this through developing partnerships. A good example of this is in Uganda, where increased responsibility for district development planning is being given to local councils. Thus district development plans are partly an outcome of political debate rather than simply a product of the bureaucracy. Elected representatives rather than bureaucrats have final responsibility for the approval of such plans. Hence, by working within the framework for local service provision laid out in such plans, NGOs are engaged in a process that has strong local accountability. While NGOs themselves may not be locally accountable, at least the activities they undertake in that particular district will be because they are locked within a framework that has been approved by local councillors who in turn are locally accountable.

### **The Problem of Local Elites**

In the Third World, where decentralisation is given the official objective of mobilising the poor in development efforts, it may be recognised that local institutions have simply provided yet more resources and power to be commandeered by already powerful elites and propertied interests. (Smith 1985:5)

Much policy on decentralisation equates decentralisation with democracy. It assumes that in devolving power to local government bodies it will ensure that such bodies will be more able to meet the needs of local citizens than central government agencies. However, this ignores the reality of unequal local power structures in which local elites can dominate. Devolving power to local government or allocating resources to local civil society organisations may in fact mean devolving power to local elites who control local institutions. Rather than promoting the interests of the majority such local institutions may protect the interests of the

elite (Haque 1997). As was discussed in Chapter 1, it is vital to understand local power structures and the implications of these for the relationship between government and civil society at the local level.

Kiondo's (1995) study of local development in Tanzania provides much insight into the role of local elites in the changing nature of relationships between government and civil society. This study reviewed the role of NGOs in nine districts in Tanzania in 1993. In particular, Kiondo analyses the role of the newly formed District Development Trusts. He argues that in the districts studied, these development trusts have been instrumental in the integration of local state-based elites on the one hand and private elites on the other. In some districts, the trusts have been allocated responsibility for collecting the development levy, which was formerly allocated to the district council. Accountability in such trusts is limited to local elites, many of whom are based in Dar es Salaam anyway. Decisions are made without consulting local people who, through the development levy and levies on crop sales, are the main contributors to the funds. Kiondo characterises these trends as a *de facto* privatisation of local government which is not accountable to the electorate. Main beneficiaries have been those who can afford transport and school fees rather than the poor, rural majority.

This is not just a problem for devolved local government, and in this respect it is important to re-emphasise the political nature of administration in Africa. Even in the case of deconcentrated government field agencies, their officers may be under great pressure from local elites to serve their interests despite their direct accountability to central government. As Smith notes, the field officer is a 'political animal' within the country he serves and that 'decentralisation to bureaucrats by no means removes administration from politics. It simply alters the opportunity for different groups to wield power' (1985:206).

### **The Role of Central Government**

While central government has undermined the independence and local accountability of local governments, as was discussed in Chapter 3, there are certain responsibilities and roles that need to be retained by central government. One of the most important functions that central government can do is to ensure equality in the provision of both public services and political freedom across the country. In countries with wide variations in wealth between different regions, central government has a role in redistributing wealth to ensure that there is a uniform standard of basic services across the country (Smith 1985). Otherwise huge disparities in the level of public services may appear. Central government also has a role in ensuring that standards of administration are maintained throughout the country. It can provide minimum standards for local government and take action to prevent abuses of authority by local government. It can also provide a counterweight to the power of local elites (Oluwu and Smoke 1992).

Central government clearly has an important role in protecting the interests of its citizens from poor local government and economic marginalisation. Yet this is a rather static role and raises the question of whether central government can play a more dynamic part in its relations with local government and civil society. It is worth examining a major study by Tandler (1997) on Brazil which shows many interesting examples of strategic interventions by the central government in order to improve local governance. The core of her argument, based on extensive empirical research in Ceará State in North East Brazil, is that good municipal

government in the state has been an outcome of a three-way relationship between central government (state level), local government (municipal) and civil society. She rejects the 'prevailing development wisdom' which assumes that a strong civil society is a prerequisite for good government and argues that central government has played a key role in building the capacity of civil society to demand better local government.

According to Tendler, improvements in local government were dependent on an active central government, not just demands from civil society. For example, with regard to the drought relief programme, the state government took away the powers of mayors to decide where jobs and construction projects would go. This responsibility was transferred to a state representative who imposed strict criteria for funding projects which virtually stopped projects being used to serve the interests of 'local notables'. In the health sector, the state government took over the hiring and firing of municipality based health agents and laid down rules for worker conduct on the grounds that such workers have been used by local officials for their own political purposes. While civil society organisations did play an important role in improving the performance of local government, Tendler argues that central government also supporting the strengthening of civil society. It did this in three main ways: first, through public information campaigns to inform local citizens of what they should expect from local government in order that they may be better able to monitor the performance of local government; secondly, by only allowing services to be provided through producer organisations rather than through individuals or individual companies; and thirdly, by insisting that representatives of civil society participate in municipal level decision-making bodies.

Tendler's conclusions have implications for NGO advocacy work and relates back to the discussion in Chapter 2 on the need for both advocacy work at the centre and engagement in project implementation at the local level. If, as in the case of Ceará State in North East Brazil, the central government can make strategic interventions to improve local government and strengthen civil society, this could be taken up by NGOs and other civil society organisations as a subject for advocacy work with central government. This would depend on collaboration between NGOs working at the local level, who understand the local political environment, and those with the capacity to undertake lobbying and campaigning at the national level.

### **Civil Society and Local Democracy**

This report has consistently argued that strengthening civil society alone will not lead to democratic government. Rather both the great diversity of groups within civil society and their relationships with the state need to be considered before any strategies for improving democratic governance can be made. Nonetheless, a vibrant civil society representing a wide number of different interest groups is essential for improving local government (Manor 1995). For, if power is devolved to local government, who will take responsibility for constantly monitoring the actions of elected representatives. The occasional interventions of central government to redress particular abuses of authority by local governments, while essential, cannot possibly monitor the myriad of decisions made on a day-to-day basis by local government on the allocation of resources. Only the vigilance of a large number of local civic groups, representing the interests of local people, can do this.

For NGOs concerned with strengthening local democracy this has two implications. First, this requires the institutional development of local civic groups. Encouraging local groups to take

responsibility for decision-making in project implementation is a means of strengthening the capacity of poor and marginalised people to organise themselves around issues of common concern. This is an area in which many NGOs have been traditionally very strong, promoting participatory development and the empowerment of local people.

The second is potentially more controversial and involves civic education work to ensure that people know their rights as citizens and how to exercise these rights. Public information campaigns, at both national and local levels, are an important means of achieving this. This may be opposed by the government on the grounds that it is interfering in politics. In situations where local democracy is a recent development, local people may need to be informed of what they should expect from their elected representatives and what are the mechanisms for exercising their voice within the system.

Thus, it is only at the end of this report that the specific issue of initiatives to strengthen local civil society has been raised. It is only after an analysis of both relations between civil society and the state, and within civil society itself, that any meaning can be attached to the concept of 'strengthening' civil society. For NGOs, this means a rejection of the current idealisation of civil society as the foundation for local democracy in the South and a recognition that local governance is an outcome of complex, local power relationships. Strengthening civil society has to be considered within this context as one of many strategies for improving local governance.

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