

## **The Role of the Church in Advocacy: Case Studies from Southern and Eastern Africa**

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and Deborah Ajulu**

The primary objective of this research has been to review the experiences and analyse the role of the mainline churches in advocacy in support of human rights, democracy and poverty alleviation in Africa. It has set out to identify what is the particular contribution that churches can bring to such advocacy, and what opportunities exist for mutual support from other organisations involved in campaigning for human rights and democratic development. In particular the relationship between church-related NGOs in Europe and the mainline churches in Africa for advocacy work is examined.

The analysis is based on an examination of three issues that are considered to be critical to the effective involvement of churches in advocacy: the external linkages and relationships of the church to other groups in society; the organisational implications of engaging in advocacy; and thirdly the ideological and theological positioning of the Church. Case studies were conducted on: the role of the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK) in advocating for human rights and democracy; the role of the churches in Malawi in the transition to a multi-party democracy, and the role of the churches in advocating on economic issues in Zambia.

### **The INTRAC Occasional Papers Series**

INTRAC's Occasional Papers are designed to both inform and stimulate debate concerning development policy and practice, with particular reference to the NGO sector. The perspectives are derived from INTRAC's own research, training and consultancy work with development agencies, both in the North and the South.

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# Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Preface	4
Chapter 1. Introduction	6
Chapter 2. Historical Overview	15
Part I: Northern NGO Perceptions	22
Chapter 3. Church-Related Northern NGOs: An Advocacy Role?	23
Chapter 4. Northern NGO Support for Southern-Based Advocacy	32
Part II: Southern Case Studies	
Chapter 5. Kenya: The Role of the NCKK in Advocating for Human Rights and Democracy	43
Chapter 6. Malawi: The Role of the Churches in the Democratic Transition	56
Chapter 7. Zambia: The Role of the Churches in Advocating for Economic Rights	70
Chapter 8. Conclusion	83
References	91
Appendix 1	99
Appendix 2	101

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## **Preface**

Churches in many developing countries play a vitally important role in offering assistance to poor and marginalised people, both as short-term aid and as long-term programmes for social development. In Africa in particular, churches have played a major role in the provision of basic social services. This tradition began in the late nineteenth century, when most missionary organisations began to set up mission schools, hospitals and dispensaries. The education and health programmes run by the various missions was generally far more extensive than those run by colonial governments. Furthermore, while the latter generally concentrated on secondary schools and urban health provision, the missions were often the sole provider of primary schools and dispensaries in rural areas.

However, in addition to its role in service provision, churches have played a key role in speaking out against abuses of human rights, social injustice and poverty. Advocacy on behalf of poor, marginalised and the oppressed people has been and remains a major contribution of churches to civil society. Although some would argue that to a certain extent missionaries paved the way for colonialism, during the colonial period itself missionaries were frequently influential voices of opposition to colonial policies that had an oppressive and exploitative impact on Africans. In the post-colonial period, many African church leaders have continued the critical stance of many churches towards governments and donors and continued to play a key advocacy role on social issues.

In the 1990s, both official donors and Northern NGOs have increasingly considered support for civil society in the South a major priority. Much of this support has focused on those organisations within civil society which take an advocacy role in relation to governments on human rights, democratisation and poverty. Yet often the churches are overlooked, despite the fact of their historical role in advocacy. Equally, there is a tendency on the part of the churches to work in isolation from other actors within civil society. There is a need for the churches and others to think about ways in which mutual collaboration may lead to more effective interventions, while recognising that each has different and unique roles to play within civil society.

The primary objective of this research has been to review the experiences and analyse the role of churches and church organisations in advocacy in support of human rights, democracy and poverty alleviation in Africa. It has set out to identify what is the particular contribution that churches can bring to such advocacy, and what opportunities exist for mutual support from other organisations involved in campaigning for human rights and democratic development. In particular the relationship between church-related NGOs in Europe and churches in Africa for advocacy work is examined. The main focus of the research will be on the major missionary-established churches in Africa, notably the Catholic, Lutheran, Presbyterian and Anglican churches, and church-related development organisations in Europe.

The analysis is based on an examination of three main issues that are considered to be critical to the effective involvement of churches in advocacy: the external linkages and relationships of the church to other groups in society; the organisational nature of the church; and the ideological and theological position of the church. As this research is

intended as the first phase of a more study, its aim is to review these three areas in order to highlight those issues and questions which may demand further analysis.

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction**

## **Background to the Study**

This study is a part of ongoing policy-related research by INTRAC on civil society. In the last five to ten years development agencies have become increasingly interested in supporting civil society as a way of broadening and deepening their development impact. Throughout the world, religious organisations are at the heart of civil society and as such an examination of their roles is important. To give a focus to the research the advocacy role of churches in Africa was chosen. INTRAC has worked with a number of church-related development organisations both in Europe and in Africa. Northern church-related NGOs have noted that support for advocacy work is increasingly being prioritised by their partners in Africa and it is in response to this that advocacy was chosen as the central focus of this study. We are very grateful to DanChurchAid and Norwegian Church Aid for financing this research and hope that the issues raised here will be informative to them and other northern NGOs as they consider increasing their involvement in and support of advocacy work.

## **The Structure of the Report**

This chapter outlines the methodology used in the study as well as the concepts of ‘civil society’ and ‘advocacy’ whilst Chapter 2 outlines some of the key historical developments of the churches in Africa. The next section, Part I, is based on the perceptions of staff in European church-related development NGOs. The first chapter in this section draws out the issues related to the advocacy work that they do in the North, whilst the chapter that follows presents their views on the role and capacity of African churches in advocacy. Part II has three chapters, each one detailing the findings from a different case study. Each case study is based on an examination of the churches’ role in advocating on a specific issue in a particular country, thus: Chapter 5 examines the role of the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCCCK) in advocating for human rights and democracy; Chapter 6 explores the role of the churches in Malawi in the transition to a multi-party democracy, and Chapter 7 reviews the role of the churches in advocating on economic issues specifically related to improving the basic standard of living in Zambia. The concluding chapter, Chapter 8, outlines some of the key themes that emerge from the study and highlights those questions and issues that could not be addressed by the study and which require further exploration.

## **Methodology**

This study has used both primary and secondary sources. The first stage of the research was a broadly based literature review. In collaboration with a steering group made up of representatives of church-related northern NGOs, a representative of CORAT - a church-related NGO support organisation based in Kenya - and academics, the review allowed a number of country case studies to be identified. The review also allowed a broad historical overview of the position of the African

mainline churches in civil society to be written. This is outlined below alongside a discussion of the concepts of advocacy and civil society, a discussion which is also based on secondary literature.

The case studies were conducted on the basis of in-depth, but focused secondary literature reviews. This enabled us to draw out, as far as is possible using secondary data only, the specific role of churches or church organisations in advocating on particular issues in the case study countries. The limitations of relying almost entirely on secondary literature are clear, however, as this is intended to be the first phase of a larger study, field-based research at this stage was ruled out. The aim of the case studies in this phase of the research has been to draw out the issues from existing material. African sources were used wherever possible.

Chapters 2 and 3 draw on interviews conducted with staff from several of the major church development NGOs in Switzerland, Germany, The Netherlands, Denmark, Norway and the UK. The interviews gathered information from such organisations' staff members of their experiences in the field of advocacy, specifically with respect to their relationships with partners in Africa. These two chapters are based therefore on the perceptions of those interviewed for this study and reflects their understanding of their current or potential involvement in advocacy work.

A final steering group meeting allowed for a discussion of the first draft of the study by some church-related development agencies and other independent commentators. Their comments, alongside others received from those who read part or all of the first draft, have been incorporated where possible into this document.

## **Civil Society**

This research forms part of a wider INTRAC research programme on civil society. Indeed, civil society is the central theoretical concept underpinning the study. A discussion of what we mean by civil society, what it is and how it is positioned in terms of its relationship to the State and the market, is therefore important.

In the last five to ten years the international aid community has become increasingly interested in the notion of civil society. There are, however, many different ways of understanding civil society. Different schools of political thought as well as different experiences of State give rise to a variety of views. Discussions of the notion of civil society within the aid community in recent years have been very generalised and uncritical and in the main, development agencies have adopted a theoretical position which is based on Western liberal notions and on an assumption of the existence of a strong State. In Africa neither can be assumed.

Civil society can be defined, very broadly, 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 counter-balance to the power of the State and the market (Clayton 1998).

Clayton outlines two very broad theoretical positions regarding the type of organisation that can be included as a part of civil society. One is an exclusive position and the other, inclusive.

Civil society is understood, from the *exclusive* position, to be a collection of organisations that are actively engaged in activities which aim to support or strengthen democracy. Organisations that are included in this definition are those that negotiate with the State, on behalf of their members or third parties, with the aim of making the State more democratically accountable to its citizens. Voluntary organisations, popular fronts, trade unions and professional associations are civil society organisations within this definition, whilst those organisations which may be inward looking or have a parochial outlook and which do not actively engage with the State, are excluded (Chazan 1994: 256). For instance fundamentalist religious groups, local traditional organisations and ethnic associations would all be excluded from this definition of civil society.

The exclusive position is problematic because it does not take into account the fact that non-cooperation with and disengagement from the State can also be effective in exposing the State's lack of accountability and support for democracy. By focusing on these modern, formal organisations a wide range of traditional and informal organisations are excluded. The danger is that if this concept of civil society, based on Western liberal notions, is applied in Africa, huge areas of associational life will be overlooked. For example, Azarya notes that only a 'very thin layer of population in Africa' would be visible if such a definition is used (Azarya 1994: 96).

In rejecting the narrow and limited focus of the exclusive approach, an *inclusive* position has been developed which recognises the very complex and multi-dimensional nature of the interaction between the State, civil society and the market. It demands that a much broader social analysis is made and that those organisations that exist between the family and the State, be they formal, informal, traditional or modern, secular or religious, are all taken into account.

The key questions then become:

- how do these different groups interact with one another and with the State?
- what are their different roles and comparative advantages over one another for reaching a particular goal?

Since an inclusive definition implies no judgement on the effectiveness of civil society as a counterbalance to the State, it then becomes important to identify those organisations that might promote democracy and those that might resist it. Even within one particular type of organisational grouping, for instance the churches, there may be a number of different positions adopted. For instance, some churches may be supportive of democratic processes whilst others might act in ways that undermine democratic government. This position has been clearly articulated by White.

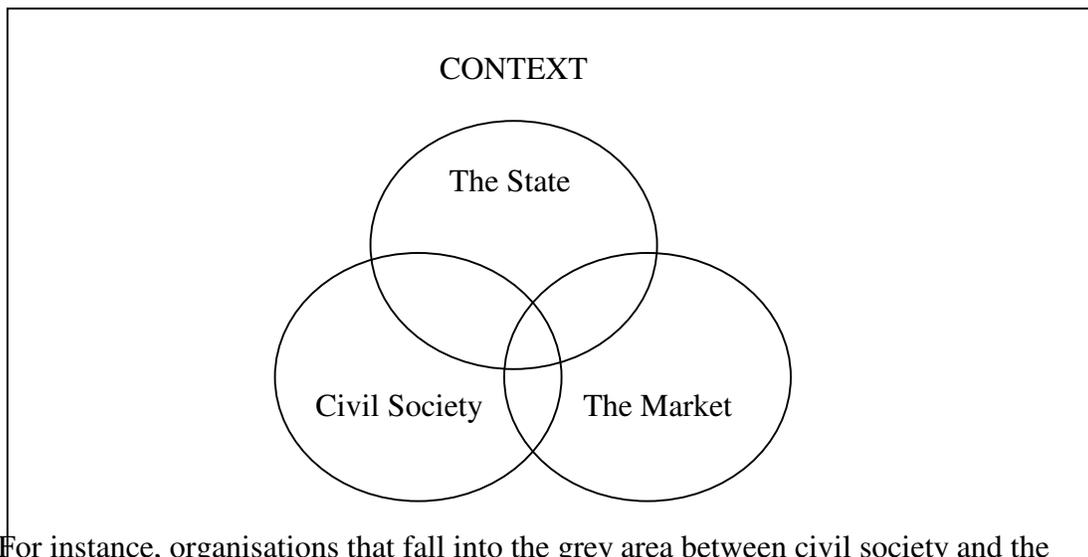
Depending on the context, some elements of civil society would be politically uninvolved, some tolerant or supportive of authoritarian rule, some working

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 democratisation in a given context. (White 1996: 182-3)

A proper mapping of the forces working both for and against democracy is critical if development agencies are to ensure appropriate, effective and targeted support of civil society. In Africa there is a wide range of constantly changing groups, many of whom have been excluded from involvement and interaction with the State. Whereas the State is a modern, often colonial creation, civil society contains both modern and traditional groups. According to Chabal (1994) it is therefore essential to look beyond formal political processes when trying to understand the nature of power in Africa.

Even if a theoretically inclusive position is adopted with regards to civil society it is important to acknowledge that certain organisations cannot formally be defined as civil society organisations if they are in some way more formally linked to the State or to the market. Thus there are a number of organisations that may straddle the boundary between State and civil society (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The State, Civil Society and the Market



For instance, organisations that fall into the grey area between civil society and the State might be those state-established organisations that are now independent or at least semi-autonomous such as a nationalised press, official trade unions in the public sector and state-sponsored women’s or youth organisations. The boundary between civil society and the market is also blurred. Co-operatives, for example, are membership organisations that engage 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 often not

market-oriented activities but rather are aimed at supporting civil society. While commercial organisations are primarily involved in the market they can also play a significant role in civil society through the provision of funding (Clayton 1998).

A further complication is that it is not only organisations that straddle the boundaries between civil society, the State and the market; individuals themselves may operate within two or all three at any one given time. For instance, a member of parliament may also play a prominent role in the Church, perhaps even as part of the clergy, whilst also being a director of a company. The need to understand the dynamics of individual's different allegiances is important, and has particular relevance to this study since it influences the interaction between Church and State and the ability of the Church to influence the State.

It is important therefore that we do not make any very generalised statements about civil society in Africa. Each country requires an analysis of the relations both between and within civil society, the State and the market.

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. (Clayton 1998)<sup>1</sup>

## **Advocacy**

The advocacy work of civil society organisations, both in the North and the South, has grown substantially in recent years. Changes to the political climate during the late 1980s and through the 1990s, particularly as a result of the end of the Cold War, in addition to the intensifying impacts of globalisation, have been significant. As development agencies have turned to focus on issues of democratisation and good governance they have been eager to support activities and organisations that might further these goals.

Another reason for an increasing interest in advocacy work, especially on the part of northern NGOs, is the widespread acknowledgement that traditional service delivery development programmes have failed to bring about any significant or widespread change, despite numerous examples of success at the micro-level. Many attribute this lack of impact, at least in part, to an absence of an enabling environment. Thus, a number of development agencies have moved away from straight service delivery programmes to become more involved in policy influencing work to create an enabling environment.

Advocacy is notoriously difficult to define and is used by different people to mean different things. In some ways this is helpful since it demands that the concept evolves, changing over time and being shaped by different contexts and

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<sup>1</sup> Much of INTRAC's thinking on civil society has been developed by Andrew Clayton. See Clayton (1996 and 1998)

understandings of power and politics. As groups engage in a process of trying to influence people or policies they build on their experiences and in a cycle of evaluation, modification and innovation consolidate their method and approach. The importance of developing context-specific advocacy approaches should not be underestimated (IDR 1998). For the purposes of this study we have taken advocacy to be a very broad and overarching concept, which covers a range of activities from discrete personal lobbying to high-profile, public campaigning. Advocacy can involve engaging with the general public to raise awareness on an important issue as well as influencing policy-makers towards a desired solution.

Although development agencies have become particularly interested in advocacy in recent years, concerned individuals and groups have for hundreds of years been involved in advocating for change. Churches in particular have had advocacy at the heart of their work. They may have called it something else - 'justice' or 'the churches' social teaching' - nevertheless, in most contexts and at most times, advocacy has been a recognised and important part of the churches' work. So advocacy initiatives are not new. In the UK, for instance, it was pressure from voluntary organisations that led to the abolition of slavery in the late 1800s.

Advocacy activity, in the North, was often initially undertaken by morally inspired politicians and other privileged groups on behalf of the poorest and most marginalised in society. Later advocacy became the job of professionally skilled individuals who were often closely aligned with the media; it is only a relatively recent development that poor and marginalised groups have come together to advocate on their own behalf. Similarly there have been shifts over time from charitable work that made no mention or reference to rights, to the introduction of rights into public discourse and finally into policy. Now the context is one in which the implementation and enforcement of rights is of paramount importance (Fowler 1999).

Alan Fowler also comments that the political history of states in the South is important in defining what those states understood, and today understand, by advocacy. How NGOs in the South, both those of southern and northern origin, chose to relate to dictatorships varied over the years and depended very much on context. Sometimes they actively engaged the military and civilian dictatorships not only on issues of policy but also through armed revolt. At other times, because of their service delivery function, they were used by dictatorships as a palliative to pacify the masses and to present a 'human face' to the outside world. And where there was no dictatorship as such, NGOs have tended to engage operationally with people in their struggles for survival. It is only in the last ten years or so that NGOs in Africa have engaged with policy advocacy work. This coincides with the onset of structural adjustment policies and the shift away from viewing national governments as the engine for development. They were now seen as corrupt and inefficient and as the cause of rather than the solution to the problems of development. During this period the political space available for the private sector and civil society organisations, such as NGOs and the churches, has opened up and they have become involved in policy arenas from which they might previously have been excluded.

Today there are a variety of definitions used by NGOs when describing their advocacy work.

1. **Advocacy:** driving public policy towards improving the lives of those who conventionally have a weaker voice and less power.  
**Advocate:** a person who supports or speaks in favour; a person who pleads for another.

(Oxford Dictionary)

2. **Advocacy:**
  - is working with other people and organisations to make a difference;
  - is putting a problem on the agenda, providing a solution to that problem and building support for acting on both the problem and solution;
  - can aim to change an organisation internally or to alter a whole system;
  - consists of different strategies aimed at influencing decision-making at the organisational, local, provincial, national and international levels;
  - strategies can include lobbying, social marketing, information, education and communication, community organising or many other tactics;
  - is the process of people participating in decision-making processes which affect their lives;
  - is pleading for, defending or recommending an idea before other people;
  - is speaking up, drawing a community's attention to an important issue, and directing decision-makers towards a solution.

(SARA/AED Advocacy Training Guide)

3. **NGO advocacy** work starts because someone sees or hears about something that literally shocks them into action. It arises from authentic concerns and a feeling that something is not right and that something has to be done about it. Much of it relates to globalisation and the increasing institutionalisation of unequal power relations. NGO advocacy therefore must be to try to reduce the inequality. Advocacy therefore is: *'to organise the strategic articulation of information to democratise unequal power relations'*.

Key functions of advocacy:

- counter-dialogue to change actions of decision makers
- filling an institutional gap between constituents and policy making institutions
- overcoming a language gap (local - English / plain English and institutional English)
- improving self-respect of poor / local communities, constituting integrity, promoting mutual trust.

Key operational elements:

- establishing a close and trusted relationship with community of beneficiaries
- obtaining accurate information and establishing clear messages or demands
- linking with appropriate networks / allies

- building effective relationship with target audience
- regularly reviewing the impacts of ones advocacy efforts.

(Peter van Tuijl - NOVIB)

4. **Advocacy** is an umbrella expression. It means: seeking to have a voice in the public debate with a view to changing attitudes of policy makers and the general public on key issues and ideas. Advocacy activities can be pursued in three principle ways:

campaigning:	seeking through public campaign to mobilise the citizens to enable them to question the decisions of policy makers
lobbying:	seeking to bring about specific policy changes to political decisions of targeted institutions, governments, intergovernmental bodies, Church structures and so on.
representation:	being present at conferences and meetings and liaising with other organisations, with a view to demonstrating [the organisation's] support, bearing witness, building relations.

(CIDSE Definition)

5. **Advocacy** involves both *using* power and *transforming* power in order to promote a new vision of society and the world - a place where relations between people can be more equitable, their basic human rights and environment protected, and the benefits generated by development more justly and productively shared.

(IDR 1998)

6. At its most basic, **advocacy** is public action directed at changing policies, positions or programmes of governing institutions within the public and private sectors. While some governments may prefer that civil society organisations only do service work and stay out of the realm of ideas, proposals and politics, advocacy is based on the belief that building democratic societies requires discussion, debate, mobilisation, even controversy. The advocacy process focuses on how ideas are advanced socially, how priorities are set, how decisions are made.

(Civicus World, May / June 1998, newsletter of Civicus, World Alliance for Citizen Participation)

The majority of these definitions of advocacy attach a particular value judgement to the notion, i.e. that through advocacy interventions the world can be made a better, more just and equal place. Indeed, it is entirely valid and proper that NGOs and other civil society organisations should position themselves within a particular set of values

and be clear about the aims of their advocacy work. It does not mean, however, that all advocacy is exclusively aimed at making the world a better place. A business, for instance, might advocate **against** the introduction of a minimum wage on the grounds that the business might become uncompetitive, whilst NGOs might advocate **for** the introduction of a minimum wage in an attempt to ensure that workers have a fair deal. Similarly some civil society organisations might lobby their government for the legalisation of abortion whilst other groups in civil society might advocate against its legalisation. In these two examples the organisations mentioned are all involved in advocacy activities, but the motivation and desired end-result obviously varies.

For the same reasons that we have adopted an inclusive position with respect to the debates surrounding civil society, it is important to analyse in broader terms which organisations in society are seeking to have a voice in public debate and to understanding their different positions and goals. Through a fuller analysis it is possible therefore to distinguish between those, for instance, paid and paying lobbyists whose aims may be purely self-interested, whether economic, social or political, and other forms of advocacy which are designed to address power imbalances, in the sense outlined in Peter van Tuijl's definition. The first definition is a more *exclusive* definition of advocacy whilst the other is more *inclusive*.

This study examines the position of churches in civil society and their role in advocacy from a broadly based, 'inclusive' understanding of advocacy and of civil society. This is important for it cannot be assumed that all churches and church-related bodies, either in the North or in the South, occupy a position within civil society which is geared towards the promotion of democracy. Likewise it cannot be assumed that their advocacy activities are always about the 'the democratisation of unequal power relations'.

## Chapter Two

### Historical overview

The churches with which this study is concerned include the mainline missionary churches in Africa: the Roman Catholic Church and three of the main Protestant churches, Anglican, Presbyterian and Lutheran. When referring to 'the churches' therefore, it is these mainline churches under consideration unless otherwise specified.

Historical evidence reveals four basic attitudes or courses of action the churches adopted either individually or together and at different times, in different countries and for different reasons. Firstly, the churches have shown *enthusiastic support* for and active identification with the intentions and goals of the State. Secondly, they have adopted a position of *passively ignoring* and withdrawing into the sphere of the purely religious becoming mute with regard to political activities, whilst accepting the

status quo. Thirdly, they have engaged in *constructive dialogue* that has allowed them to provide critical and constructive contributions to political, social and economic issues. And fourthly, they have shown *outright opposition* to the injustices of the State (Gitari and Benson 1986: 119-20). It should be noted that throughout the history of the Church in Africa there has been no clear pattern of how churches have related to political, social and economic structures, partly because changes in the political arena have been frequent and sometimes accompanied by violence. The churches have often found themselves unprepared to deal with these changes. But what can be said is that there does not seem to be any one basic formula for churches to follow; even within a single ecclesiastical tradition churches have tended to differ on the course of action adopted at different times.

The churches' activities have taken place at three levels, at the 'grass-roots', national and international levels. Depending on the desired result emphasis has sometimes been placed on one level only, at other times on two or all three levels. This is contingent on the gravity of the situation being responded to and on the nature of the issue being dealt with. Their activities at these different levels have met with both success and failure. Some factors stand out as contributing to the success of churches in advocacy. These include: the power wielded by individual church hierarchies and individual church leaders; the impact of the churches' institutional structures; ecumenism; the combined efforts of churches with other civil society associations; the churches' ability to work with grass-roots populations, providing not only education and healthcare but also an identification with and action around poverty, oppression, exploitation and other injustices people suffer; the churches' ability to document and publish factual evidence to counter false pronouncements of repressive regimes; and also when things are really bad, the ability of churches to mobilise the world-wide church through their international relationships. In the area of failure certain factors were significant and they include: the inter-church and intra-church power struggles and bitter divisions or schisms which have often weakened the churches' positions; the power of the State to create and maintain the divisions within the Church; the fear by churches of reprisals under hostile totalitarian regimes; the plurality of theological doctrines and hence the lack of one well-founded theology to guide and unite action; ideological indoctrination and corruption of the churches by the State; State promulgation of laws that prohibited some courses of action by the churches; and, the State banning infiltration and/or nationalisation of the churches and their institutional structures.

The churches' activities in advocacy can be viewed from a historical perspective by reviewing briefly the role the churches played during three periods: colonial, post colonial and post-independence.

### **The Colonial Period, Specifically the 1950s**

Missionary churches in Africa were established mainly during the colonial period. The nationality of the missionaries often coincided with that of the colonial administrators - British, French or Portuguese. One notable feature of these churches was their close relationship to the State government. Consequently missionaries and therefore their churches tended to identify with the colonial State, which at least

initially encouraged and strengthened their collaborative relationship, and even reluctant missionaries were forced into its service (Hastings 1995: 40). This close relationship worked to each party's advantage, each influencing the other, although the State often proved the more influential. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries missionaries played a crucial role in shaping African countries; sometimes negatively and sometimes positively. David Barrett writes that the

enormous social, political and religious power that has been exercised in Africa by the missions [is] comparable at least to that which the Church wielded in Europe in the Middle Ages (Barrett 1968: 86)

It was often common for alliances to be made between the colonial administration and the missionaries and between missionaries and Africans. Indeed it is said that Western governments sometimes acted in African affairs at the instigation of missionaries (Adoyo 1990: 27). Two examples suffice here: first, it was on the advice of missionaries that the alliance between Uganda and Britain was made, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), a missionary arm of the British Anglican Church being particularly influential in this case (Gray 1966: 467). Secondly, in Malawi (then Nyasaland) the Scottish missionaries made possible the assimilation of Malawi to the British empire, frustrating the Portuguese efforts and any Arab threat (Ayandele 1966: 139).

Although colonial governments and missionaries collaborated the latter worked closely with the Africans, learning the local languages, interpreting treaties and providing advice. To this extent certain missionaries were trusted by some Africans. Instances are cited of African leaders enlisting the support of missionaries and thus influencing the course of events to their advantage. One such example is that of King Moshesh of Basutoland (now Lesotho) who was able to make Basutoland a British protectorate, thus defeating the aim of the South Africa Boers to annexe it. This was done with strong missionary representation to the governor of the Cape (Berman 1975: 529). The second example is of the Masai in Kenya who resisted being moved to new land by the colonial government as a result of missionary support.

Although some missionaries were able to exert their influence in the way described it is still important to remember that colonial governments were in a better position to use missionaries in pursuit of their own agendas. Barrett argues that: 'the use of religion as an institutional means of social control' by the colonial powers 'has a long and much-studied history'. These powers viewed 'religious congregations ... as valuable instruments for pacifying the conquered' (1968: 87). The missionaries on their part are known to have given tacit approval to the way in which colonial governments used religion as a means of justifying their position of power. It was felt too that many missionaries had willingly shared in the practice of the colour bar and had too often closed their eyes to other colonial injustices (Hastings 1979: 94). Examples of the extremes of this position are the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and the Catholic Church in Portuguese controlled Africa. But it is also noteworthy to say that there were churches in some African countries which did not enjoy such a favourable position with colonial regimes. For example, in Portuguese Africa, the Anglicans and Presbyterians were regarded with suspicion by the colonial

regime; and in South Africa there were some English-speaking churches that took different sides to that taken by the Dutch Reformed Church and as such incurred disfavour with the colonial regime.

In the wake of the struggle for independence mission churches adopted different courses of action when the call came to participate in anti-colonial activities or movements. Those churches that had close ties with colonial governments found it difficult to disentangle themselves from their colonial heritage and could do no more than either actively support the government's position or take the apolitical stance of accepting the status quo believing that the existing government was good enough and should therefore not be criticised in public.

Other churches, however, adopted and promoted an approach which was strongly anti-racist and was later furthered by progressive Christians who are quoted as saying 'Christians must get off the colonial barricades ... and lead the anti-colonial crusade' (Hastings 1979: 102). At about the same time, in 1956, some Black African Catholic students in France declared that it was a Christian duty to decolonise, and regretted the complicity of those Catholics who resisted ending the colonial system. Meanwhile some colonial powers, especially Britain and France, were working towards ending colonialism, a process in which some church leaders played a prominent and significant role.

In the late 1950s some church leaders engaged in political activities which they felt might contribute towards the creation of good political parties with sound Christian leaders. In various African countries political parties emerged which were characterised by fairly strong religious inspiration and which emphasised the virtues of western democracy, racial partnership and harmony, and anti-communism. One of these movements, called the Capricorn African Society, started in Rhodesia and spread to other parts of southern Africa. It was supported primarily by English missionary leaders. Other such parties included the Democratic Party in Uganda, which was launched with the aid of Catholics; and the Basotho National Party in Basutoland. Although many of these parties fizzled out, a number did remain as independent parties with declining ecclesiastical links.

Some church leaders, however, did not like the implications and consequences of institutionalising Christian political views in opposition to other nationalist parties since this would alienate hard-line nationalists. They preferred to lend general political guidance and to cultivate good relationships with politicians irrespective of their allegiances to particular political parties. The Catholic bishops, in pursuing this line of action, found an outlet in writing pastoral letters on the evolution of society. These letters, issued by a 'whole bench of bishops', often carried much weight and would normally be implemented by a wide range of churches. An example was the bishops' letter of 11 July 1953 in Tanganyika entitled 'Africans and the Christian Way of Life'. It was about politics, education and economics in relation to the development of Tanganyika.

During the colonial era which lasted into the 1950s and early 1960s for much of Africa, the main churches were mission churches, all led by expatriates. The churches were only able to implement very limited advocacy activities mostly at the local level,

sometimes only through lone voices of individual churchmen. This was due to the close relationship that churches tended to have with colonial governments. It could also be argued that such a scenario resulted because the Church was just establishing itself in colonial territories, which were themselves still being established. It is therefore possible that the churches saw their role mainly as preachers of the gospel to win converts, for which they were well prepared, in addition to providing some social services in education and health that complemented the government's activities. They had little concern, however, or were unequipped to cope with, political issues and State injustices.

### **The Post-Colonial Period: 1960s-1970s**

The 1960s mark a period when political independence was gained by a number of African countries. Hastings argues that at this time there was only a slight shift in the relationship between Church and State. Some nationalist leaders had an educational background and became members of various mainline churches. For instance: Kaunda and Banda, Presbyterian; Nkomo and Sithole, Methodist; Nyandoro, an Anglican; Nyerere, Mugabe and Chikerema, Catholics - and their personal friendships with leading churchmen were of considerable importance for securing the status and orientation of the mainline churches. These new African leaders not only trusted these churches but also based their political ideologies on their religious inheritance - e.g. the religious philosophy of Sengher; the Protestant humanist ethic of Kaunda; and the radical Catholicism of Nyerere. All this contributed to the life of the post-colonial churches.

As independent governments consolidated their positions, the privileged position of the Church declined. The links between the two weakened and some ties were severed altogether through emerging conflicts: in some instances because governments moved away from religious ideals and in others became intolerant of the churches, and sometimes because churches became suspicious of the governments' activities which they could no longer support or condone. Conflicts arose in most cases when: i) new governments took control of church institutions, such as schools; ii) there was a movement away from liberal democracy by governments; iii) governments took control of the press; iv) governments formed ideologically controlled youth movements; v) governments instituted preventive detention of opponents; and vi) leaders sought personal glorification and by drawing on Christian terminology built a religious mystique around their leadership; an example of this is Malawi where Banda became a revered demigod.

The churches grew more and more suspicious about their intervention within the political arena. As governments started cracking down on civic organisations - the press, trade unions, chieftainships - it left the mainline churches as the only independent organisations with any influence. In a number of instances these mainline churches survived because the government recognized their contribution. However, in some countries such as Zaire, and the Portuguese-controlled countries, small independent churches that were now growing in number, were outlawed on a charge of possibly fomenting discontent and resistance, and their inability to offer

government anything worthwhile. In other States meanwhile, such as Zambia and Tanzania, the leaders remained true to their Christian conviction. They were convinced that Christian faith and politics were inseparable and thus the relationship between the State and the mainline churches remained intact.

There were situations, however, where the churches' influence was weakened through denominational divisions and the close ties adopted by different denominations with different ethnic or tribal groups. This often meant that no one church could speak effectively to the nation's conscience on vital issues. In Kenya, for example, the Presbyterian Church was closely allied to the Kikuyu political leadership while other churches had close ties with non-Kikuyu political leaders. This rendered each church weak when speaking on an individual basis, until an ecumenical body, the Kenya Christian Council, was formed and its voice began to be heard.

Mainline churches often encapsulated within their ecclesiastical leadership dominant individuals with status and intellect who dared at times not only to speak out with a lone prophetic voice against State injustice, but also led activities such as writing joint letters and documents and forming ecumenical structures for action. Such efforts sometimes met with stiff government reprisals of deportations, imprisonment, withdrawal of resident permits, or refusal of passports and the deliberate creation of divisions between churches. These were times when church hierarchies adopted a safe apolitical stance and polite ecumenism. Sometimes they only paid lip service to the ideals of charity, reconciliation and justice and in reality the church leadership did not challenge any of the underlying presuppositions or mechanisms of oppression.

This period is marked by a differentiation of the churches' advocacy work in various countries. It is significant to note that the mission churches continued to provide leadership in the struggle for peace and justice. Their leaders continued to be expatriate in the main although Africanisation was taking place. The African Independent Churches continued to grow throughout this period, but due to their fragmented nature and lack of engagement with social issues, they have not had a significant impact in the area of advocacy. This period also demonstrates the various factors that were both promotive and prohibitive of the success in church advocacy activities.

### **The Post-Independence Period: 1980s-early 1990s**

In many African countries, this period is marked by struggle against oppressive political systems led by either military or civilian dictators. In both situations the civilian population was faced with a single authority: military or one-party regime. Furthermore, African governments in the 1980s and early 1990s were confronted with socio-political and economic crises that curtailed their capacity to provide State services. The task of providing such services had during this time (though its roots are in the 1970s) fallen squarely on the voluntary sector of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), church agencies and churches. Gifford argues that in the 1980s churches played an increasingly major role in wider society. This role involved churches not only in the traditional activities of education, health and development, but also in direct political activity. 'This has involved challenging political structures,

urging reforms, advocating political change, and even presiding over the change itself' (Gifford 1995: 3).

To perform that particular role, the churches during this period became better equipped in their organisational and institutional structures. These structures, some of which have been ecumenical, have exercised competency through developing specialised skills for dealing with critical issues.

This period saw the churches exercise their advocacy role much more than ever before. Inevitably, divisions between churches have meant that whilst some churches speak out against political injustices, others opt or are co-opted by the regime to be supportive of them, and yet others choose to remain neutral. In many instances during this period the mainline churches - the majority now with African leadership - played a major role in opposing despotic dictators, and had become agitators for constitutional and political reform. In Part II of this report, case studies highlight some of the advocacy interventions of the Church in Kenya, Malawi and Zambia. First, however, the international links of churches in Africa to church-related northern NGOs is examined from the perspective of northern church-related NGO staff members. Their views on the advocacy activities of churches in Africa and of the support they provide their church partners via their engagement in advocacy work in the North, are presented and discussed.

# **PART I**

## **Northern NGO Perceptions**

### **Chapter 3**

# Church-Related Northern NGOs: An Advocacy Role?

## Introduction

Church-related development agencies are becoming increasingly interested in advocacy work. DanChurchAid and Norwegian Church Aid funded this study as a part of a process of considering an expansion of their support for and involvement in advocacy work. This chapter, based on interviews with church-related NNGO staff members, shows that this interest is shared. Several agencies which have always had advocacy as a stated policy objective are now involved in refocusing or increasing their work in this field. And others which would *not* formerly have identified advocacy work as one of their activities are beginning to consider including advocacy in their mandate and activities. Whilst acknowledging that renewed interest in advocacy is a recent development for most northern NGOs, many noted that, in addition to their role in service provision, churches and related organisations have always played a key role in speaking out against abuses of human rights, social injustice and poverty. So why the renewed interest? And why now?

## Northern NGOs: Why the Renewed Interest in Advocacy?

Many of those in northern NGOs suggested that their recent interest in advocacy was due to demands that they have recently received from their southern partners, asking them to take up issues in the North on their behalf:

As donors we have had requests for support of national advocacy campaigns for many years but it is new that the churches are now asking us [their northern partners] to take up issues here in the North on their behalf. With the NCKK (National Council of Churches in Kenya) it is the first time in the African context that a church body has asked [our organisation] to take up an issue on their behalf in the North.

A number of explanations were offered to the question 'why now?'. The recent donor focus on support for strengthening civil society as a route to and prerequisite for democracy may be important since churches have been identified as key civic actors, particularly in Africa. The changes to the political climate at the end of the 1980s and during the 1990s, as a result of the end of the Cold War and the impact of globalisation is also significant:

As people come further in their understanding of globalisation the demands on us are increasingly to change our role - to work more towards effecting a change in global systems.

The realisation that the traditional focus on community development and service delivery programmes has not led to any very widespread and significant long-term changes is also often quoted. There was an acknowledgement that development issues

are linked to political issues and that an understanding of the complexities and the holistic nature of development necessarily leads churches and related agencies to involve themselves not only in the 'patching-up' of problems but in addressing their root causes as well. Some even questioned whether they should continue supporting initiatives that did not have an advocacy component.

Whatever the rationale for the apparent importance that agencies are attaching to advocacy it is a truism that organisations involved in development work, those in both the North and the South, are operating in a rapidly changing context; a context to which they must adapt if they are to be effective. There have always been debates between northern and southern NGOs about their respective roles and responsibilities and today advocacy is at the heart of many such discussions.

Although organisations in the South still want us to continue providing support for services we are expected to change our role as well ... part of this is that we are asking our partners to examine and to question themselves about *their* roles, so in return we are being asked to examine *ours*.

It was clear from the research that there was considerable tension in the relationship between the North and South. Whilst this is partly a response, as indicated, to demands from the South (for funds to enable them to engage in advocacy locally as well as requests for their northern partners to engage in advocacy in the North) that is only part of the picture. Northern NGOs are under increasing pressure to justify their old roles and to find new roles which are more appropriate in the changing environment. The tension comes with a lack of clarity over desired and appropriate roles:

Although we feel that they [southern churches and church-related southern NGOs] should be involved in advocacy we must not force this as we have forced so many other agendas onto people. They need to come to us with their ideas and then we should adapt to meet the challenge.

... we may encourage and advise but at the end of the day they should know what is important and what is feasible and appropriate in their context and we should be here to support that.

A burning question that a number of the staff of northern agencies wanted answered was what the churches in Africa actually see as their role, whether it is pastoral (i.e. giving people hope of a better life after death), or prophetic (i.e. making heaven a reality here on earth by being involved in poverty eradication by whatever means possible). The donors felt that their own role would be clearer if they knew which role their partners had chosen for themselves.

Indeed, it may well be the case that southern churches and related organisations might like to ask the same questions of their northern partners. What do northern agencies see as their role in advocacy in the North? And how do they prioritise their work? Although there was a real desire and much talk about being partner led, the reality, the northern NGOs admitted, rarely lived up to rhetoric.

In principle we take the lead from our partners ... but if a legitimate concern is raised by others we may go with that ... and we may [in turn] push the churches we have contacts with in Africa to take up an issue if we feel it is a particularly important one.

An NGO policy officer commented that by drawing on the experiences of partners *after* the advocacy issue has been identified, as many agencies do, should not be seen or construed as legitimising that choice since agencies can draw on whichever partner's voice suits their needs. Furthermore decisions about which advocacy work to undertake are made according to: constituencies' concerns; the amount of space on the political agenda; the possibility of making a unique or high-profile contribution; the possibility of working together with others on an issue; the availability of specialist knowledge for working in a particular field, and whether the campaign has a hope of achieving its goals.

In the context of funding cuts northern NGOs are under increasing pressure to engage in advocacy activities that relate not only to partner concerns and to issues which build on their added value, but also to issues which will raise the profile of their organisation and therefore support for it. One person, for instance, commented:

Some agencies work on general issues but we work only on those issues that our partners raise and which our partners want us to get involved with. But we also work only on those issues that the public can relate to. Because we are dependent on public funds we will only work on those issues that can mobilise public support.

Many church agencies are facing funding cuts, most significantly the Protestant AGKED agencies in Germany, who must lose around 30% of their staff by the year 2000. A northern NGO staff member in Germany noted:

Whilst in the '60s it was all about transfer of resources, now what people *talk* about is the importance of lobbying and campaigning on specific issues. But in reality, within the current context of funding cuts, the first to go are those on the advocacy and policy desks.

Whilst many agencies run advocacy campaigns few have advocacy desks since it is easier, and less financially demanding, to fund a specific campaign than to fund a more generalised capacity for advocacy. But in order to work on issues that partners raise and to act on opportunities that arise, it was felt by some to be essential to have this more general capacity to respond, either internally or by linking with other relevant northern campaigning groups. Some agencies, however, are unable to fund any such work in the North and have had to be creative to find ways of responding to partners requests for them to engage in advocacy work in the North.

The way we got around this [not having funds for northern-based work] is to send the funds to our partners in the South who then send the funds back to Germany to another NGO who specialises in working on that issue here ... We felt the need to do something about this somehow crazy situation so now raise funds specifically for related work both in the South and in Germany.

Yet the contradiction is, of course, that without financial independence recipient agencies or organisations find themselves somewhat beholden to the changing policy priorities of the donors. Indeed, as the northern NGO donors themselves admit:

the donor with the most money has the biggest influence ... funding is so critical and until they [southern churches and related NGOs] can raise their own funds they will have little ability to be independent and follow the direction which they see to be important.

Perhaps many of these funding concerns are portrayed here in rather sharp relief, coming as they do out of the German context where the cuts are more acute. They are, however, reflected to a lesser degree elsewhere. But agencies are not only 'funding-led' they also prioritise their work on the basis of their added value, both their own inherent added value and their added value in relation to others active in the field of advocacy.

### **Northern NGOs: What is their Added Value in Advocacy Work?**

Some of those interviewed commented that northern NGOs have significant added value in the field of advocacy and lobbying in the North since they have already developed a knowledge of bi- and multilateral agencies, the workings of global financial and legal systems and have developed contacts within these agencies which allow them to operate more effectively. Those church-related northern NGOs already involved in lobbying therefore more often focus their work on international multilaterals and bilaterals than on other organisations, for instance, within the private sector. The need to improve the practices of the private sector was seen as very important although there was a recognition that if they are to be effective in bringing about change in private sector practices NGOs had a lot to learn in this field.

The position of church-related northern NGOs with respect to their own governments was seen to be important for governments can easily turn to church-based NGOs in their own countries for advice since they are perceived as having moral standing, legitimacy, a constituency and good contacts through their southern church partners. Being in a position to influence a northern government to put political pressure on a southern government, in a way that is not possible for a southern group or individual, can be very important. But a dilemma for them was: who should speak for whom? and how involved can southern partners be in such a process?

Whilst some agencies, particularly those in the UK, were confident of their ability and capacity to get involved in advocacy work others were less so.

I feel the role of NGOs in international advocacy is overstated ... we may launch a problem [raise an issue] with our government but we don't have the expertise to back up our arguments and debate with them at their level. Governments can employ consultants to take up issues and work with them but we just can't do that so our capacity is very limited in that sense ... we are not

like Oxfam, for instance, which has a great deal of in-house capacity for advocacy.

... we need to ask ourselves whether we have the capacity to get involved in advocacy work ourselves ... we need to think through how we would prioritise work, how we would measure outputs and impacts and how things like this would be 'projectised' - and at this stage we don't have the tools to do it.

Although the need to improve their practice was acknowledged some thought that it is important to recognise the added value and legitimacy that their ongoing relationships with partners bring them in their advocacy work. For instance,

Their work on SAP [Structural Adjustment Policies] feeds into our work here - our discussions here in the North on SAPs. And our knowledge of the workings of the [World] Bank allows us to support our partners in terms of advising on why it may be important [for them] to meet with Bank people locally; who it might be most important to meet and on which issues the Bank is particularly concerned and therefore on which issues they can contribute.

This acknowledgement of added value was nevertheless seen in the context of and recognition that other single-issue campaigning organisations often have more expertise on certain issues than they do. Thus, some questioned whether issues are best addressed from inside NGOs themselves or whether it is more effective to support independent single-issue groups, or indeed to work through both channels. One of the key factors often quoted in successful advocacy work is joint working outside the church network as well as within it.

Thus the church agencies have set up various network organisations the role of which is, in part, to co-ordinate advocacy activities on behalf of the member agencies. For instance APRODEV, the Protestant network agency, commissioned a paper called 'Discerning the Way Together'. Although some felt that this was heading in the right direction they noted that there still remained areas on which the group should be collaborating, but that there was resistance to doing so because of the competition between the agencies. CIDSE, the Catholic network agency, recently appointed an advocacy officer to co-ordinate activities related to building the capacity of southern churches and related organisations for advocacy as well co-ordinating the Catholic agencies' contribution to the debt relief campaigns. In Germany there is an organisation called GKKD (Joint Conference on Churches in Development) which is a joint Protestant and Catholic venture that has also invited others, such as academics and discussion partners from government, to debate key policy issues such as the coherence of development policies. In The Netherlands, Bilance and ICCO and seven other church agencies united to create BBO which co-ordinates all lobbying of the Dutch Government on behalf of the agencies. It has been running for five years, has four core staff and its board is composed of the nine directors of the nine member agencies. BBO's work plan is set each year by the board yet staff within Bilance and ICCO were still unclear about what the specific role of the BBO should be and what, on the other hand, the role of the individual agencies should be.

Clarity over roles is important. In deciding what role as an agency it is possible to play with regard to advocacy it is important to establish the roles of others already involved in advocacy work. For instance, BftW (theoretically supportive of advocacy work) debated whether it should become involved in advocacy work at all since the broader organisational structure of which they are part already has a human rights department (working on human rights issues both in Germany and abroad); other church-related organisations in Germany, such as the GKKD, specialise in advocacy work; and, other non-church organisations, for instance the smaller secular single-interest groups are also engaged in advocacy initiatives. So rightly they questioned what the added value of BftW might be. That they have decided to become involved in advocacy work is justified by their link with partners.

How church-related northern NGOs relate to churches and other constituencies in the North is also important to consider in terms of their engagement in advocacy in the North. Although this was not discussed explicitly by those interviewed, mention was made of the need to prioritise issues which would be of interest to constituency members, but only in the context of the need to raise funds. With respect to their position in relation to other northern church bodies one person reflected that although they are a Catholic agency they try always to attend meetings ‘with an NGO hat on’.

We don't relate to the Bishops Conference very much ...and although we do relate to the Catholic secretariat we try to be as independent as possible as we don't want to get into a situation where we have to ask their permission to get involved or take a particular stance on an issue.

## **Organisational implications**

For organisations to be effective in carrying out advocacy they need an appropriate organisational structure and a full range of specific competencies and concomitant resources. The current organisational structures, resources and competencies of the church-related northern NGOs for advocacy appear to vary widely. As already mentioned, most agencies are involved, at various levels, in reflecting on their strengths and weaknesses and on the current dilemmas and problems they face with respect to engaging in advocacy. The organisational implications for agencies wanting to increase their involvement were discussed and some of these are outlined below.

It was common, for instance, for northern NGO staff members to be unclear about whose responsibility advocacy should be and what the processes were internally for deciding which issues were taken up and which were not. One programme officer noted that if a partner was to raise an issue about which they felt concerted advocacy action was necessary she would be unclear about which department within her organisation to take it to and which organisations outside her own might be approached for assistance. Indeed, several people noted that the internal linkages between the policy and campaigns departments and the overseas programme departments are weak and even antagonistic. Some also believed there could be better links between campaign work which targets the general public and that which

involves a more technical level of lobbying with those that need to be influenced to effect a change, whether that is government or multilateral organisations or even private sector companies. The following are some typical comments made by northern NGO staff about their internal linkages.

We have a problem with the split between the programme department and the policy department. The programme department want us to be partner-led but the policy department feels that we have to choose those issues which fit with whatever issue is on the agenda at the time ...we do however approach our partners once the issues have been identified.

During my time in Central America some of our partners raised an issue with me that they felt we might be able to advocate on here. So I wrote to my colleagues to raise the issue - I linked the churches there with churches here - but I never managed to get anything to happen because at that time there were other priorities here. And that is just the way it works. You can't campaign on all the issues that you see are a problem in the field. You have to be targeted. But it was frustrating.

... we need to work out who should be responsible for it [advocacy] within our organisation; how it should be structured. Should it be with projects? Or can we hire consultants to do training in advocacy with our partners? We have water consultants on our books but we don't have people who could do training in skills needed for advocacy initiatives by our partners.

From my way of thinking advocacy should be the overarching theme - campaigns are just one part of that. But the campaigns department is not involved in discussions in the South so I would ask whether an agency like [ours] should be involved in campaigns without discussions with southern partners and communities for whom the campaign is targeted. I think there should be more equality in our relationships ...

The organisational implications inherent in the philosophy of partnership were evident from many of the interviews. It may be worth asking, for instance, whether the added value of their link with partners, so often referred to during the course of this research, is valid if the links between the programme departments and the policy / campaigns teams are as weak as they indicate. Indeed there are a number of challenges agencies face with regard to their organisational capacity for advocacy. For those agencies that want to replace their old and rather *ad hoc* approach to advocacy with a more solid basis for engaging in issues, perhaps the most important first step is to ensure that there is a 'corporate' understanding of what advocacy is. Once there is a shared understanding of what is meant by advocacy, and once senior management support is secured, a strategy can be developed to clarify who needs to play what role in the organisation.

The issues at the heart of this are: who is responsible for determining which advocacy issues are taken up and prioritised; who is responsible for carrying out that work, programmes or policy, and what the links between them should be; and, what the role of external consultants might be. Although there were a number of issues that they

still believed needed addressing, they also indicated that they had learnt a great deal over the years about advocacy work and offered various good practice learnings.

*Single-issue focus:* Many noted that it is much easier to organise work around single issues, such as landmines, than it is on very complex multidimensional issues, for instance - global poverty. The landmines campaign was pointed to by a number of those interviewed as a very successful example of international advocacy. In fact some went as far as to say that it was the first time an international campaign has been truly successful and heralded it as a model for other campaigns.

*Clearing the way for advocacy:* According to one, a critical factor for successful advocacy is the ability to educate the general public about the issue before any advocacy work can begin in earnest. The population needs first to understand the issue and its causes and to see the linkages before they are to put their weight behind it.

*Leadership:* A charismatic leadership is a critical factor. It is important to have leaders that are able to mobilise support for an issue but who can also focus on an achievable goal and spearhead the action necessary to reach that goal. Whilst this is clearly a factor that has been important in the African context, it is questionable whether the same can be said for many northern NGOs, either secular or church-related.

*Working with all of good will:* One of the key factors pointed to in many successful campaigns was the way in which a very wide range of different actors were able to come together to work on the issue. And this means people outside, as well as within, the church.

*Sound analysis:* A number of individuals pointed to the importance of the evidence. Without sound research and good analysis they felt agencies would be unable to form a valid critique and would be able only to resort to ideological positions

*Context:* The importance of context was stressed. Whether the church is an effective agent for change depends very much upon the context, and different churches and parts of the church structure will be more or less effective in different contexts.

## **Concluding Comment**

So what is the real reason for the church-related northern NGOs' increasing involvement in advocacy in the North? Some might ask if it is a disguised form of public relations aimed at gaining more funds. Or is it based on a real sense of comparative advantage of being able to lobby, through their representatives, international bodies (such as the World Bank), and of being able to effect significant changes in their domestic northern-based constituencies.

In addition to their increasing levels of advocacy work in the North agencies have for many years been involved in supporting their partners in the South with national advocacy campaigns. The next chapter examines the issues raised by those interviewed regarding their support for advocacy activities in the South

## **Chapter 4**

# **Northern NGO Support for Southern-Based Advocacy**

### **Introduction**

Northern NGOs are operating in a rapidly changing development context in which there are declining funds for development generally, an increase in the competition for available funds and an increase in direct funding by official agencies of Southern NGOs. Northern NGOs, therefore, need to prove their comparative advantage as development actors. There are three main ways in which this can be achieved. They can engage in advocacy initiatives in the North, an issue discussed in the previous chapter. They can provide specialist technical assistance, not available nationally. Or they can fund southern partner organisations in a positive and developmental way, providing the right amount of funding, at the right time and with conditions appropriate to the organisation's capacity (INTRAC 1996). In order to become a good development funder it is helpful if a relationship between the funder and the recipient organisation is built-up over time, that there is clear communication in both directions and that the capacity of both the donor and the recipient is strengthened where necessary. For northern NGOs wishing to provide their southern partners with appropriate support for advocacy work these are important concerns.

### **Developing Effective Partnerships**

Developing effective development partnerships is a central challenge for all organisations working in development. The last chapter revealed some of the inevitable tensions that exist in the relationships between North and South, and it is in that context that the need to constantly review and look at ways of improving northern NGOs relationships with partners was highlighted. Church-related northern NGOs speak of the need to improve communications with and to develop more appropriate reporting requirements for their southern partners. They ask how they can become better donors and more receptive to the needs of their partners. For instance, they are asking themselves whether they should decentralise or spend more time undertaking field visits, or even involve themselves more in N-S staff exchanges.

Many respondents discussed what they see as a trend towards the decentralisation of certain roles and responsibilities, previously in the domain of the northern NGOs' head offices, to field offices in the South. Whilst a number of agencies are considering decentralising, or have set up field offices which take on certain of the responsibilities previously held by the head office, only World Vision has a fully decentralised structure, with independent national offices that have their own boards. Such a structure allows the work of the international organisation to be fully informed by southern national offices, each of whom, alongside the northern national offices, have an equal say in the process of deciding on the organisation's priorities and

strategies. For other organisations the need to be closer and more accessible to partners is the primary rationale for considering decentralisation. Another reason was that having an established presence enables agencies to access decentralised official agency funds. There were, however, mixed feelings over the issue of decentralisation. On the one hand, some think it is a positive move while on the other some see it as a retrograde step. One NGO staff member claimed that decentralising was simply taking his agency back into a 'neo-colonial role' and gave that as the reason his organisation was 'resisting the temptation'. Yet some agencies feel the need to decentralise because of the increase in direct funding by official agencies. Embassies, now staffed by professionals engaged in identifying and funding southern NGOs locally, provide northern NGOs with competition. The question of what added value northern NGOs bring that official agencies cannot is being asked. Although embassies may wish to fund southern NGOs exclusively, the reality is that in many situations they are only able to fund organisations that are large enough to cope with the planning and reporting requirements of official agencies, which translates into funding not only southern NGOs but also northern NGOs with offices in the South. Whilst seeking to improve their relationships with partners may be part of the reason for northern NGOs to decentralise the reality for some agencies is that it is also about accessing official agency funds for *themselves* because of the declining availability of funds at home.

The need to be 'on the ground' in order to develop relationships based on regular communication, in a way that some official agencies are now able to do, is viewed as important and some agencies are, at least in an experimental way, beginning to decentralise with this objective in mind.

The fact that the SE Asian team has spent more time in the region has undoubtedly helped our partners' [advocacy] work.

There is a need to be clear, however, about the role of northern NGO field offices; whether it is about being closer in order to be a better funder, or whether it is about policy dialogue, or both. And where donor forums have been set up it has often been unclear whether their purpose is to discuss policy or whether it is to be a funding body.

Other than decentralising, agencies are also debating whether there are other ways of improving their contact and relationships with partners. More information and better communication was seen as important if partners are to recognise that northern NGOs could play an advocacy role in addition to their funding role. Yet there was also a recognition that northern NGOs have been created to support southern organisations' needs rather than the other way around! The question of whether to send northern NGO desk officers on more frequent visits or if North-South exchange and secondment of staff between agencies would be a better way forward was asked. South-South exchanges were also thought to be effective and worthy of northern NGO financial support.

Since the exchange of funds is at the heart of the vast majority of relationships between northern and southern NGOs, how that aspect of the relationship is managed and negotiated is of critical importance. Many staff believed that northern NGOs had become too stringent in their requirements of partners and that in order to be more

responsive to their partners' needs, it was necessary for them to allow a greater degree of flexibility in their relationships. Some northern NGO staff members mentioned that donors need to change their reporting requirements to make the administrative side of their partners' work easier and less time consuming.

We are not helping the churches very much with all of us having our own reporting requirements. Some of our partners are contending with up to 40 reporting requirements, all of which are different. We should come together as donors and decide on a compromise in the form of a common format for reporting requirements ... We need to put more emphasis on the qualitative rather than quantitative concerns.

Some people commented that amongst the most successful advocacy projects were those that had been initiated locally with northern support being requested at a later date and where support from the northern partner had been long term, continuous and commensurate with the size of the organisation. The importance of letting the Church and other organisations define what is important rather than imposing the wishes of the northern agencies on them was noted. One of the hardest things to achieve, according to some northern NGO staff, is the ability to support innovation by partners in a flexible way whilst also ensuring that the funds are properly accounted for.

There has been a debate in many church-related northern NGOs about who their partners should be. Under the pressure of funding cuts two agencies mentioned that their boards have been keen to ensure that they link with 'natural partners': that is, the churches or church-related southern NGOs. However, a larger number of staff spoke about the importance of supporting a broader range of organisations rather than focusing only on natural partners.

... the way in which the churches are structured in Zimbabwe puts us under great pressure, we would have to work in a corridor [in a very narrow, and limiting way] if we work only with the churches.

Indeed the way the Church very often works in 'splendid isolation', was noted by many and some felt that better links locally and internationally to non-church groups are important if the Church is to be more effective in its work.

A key debate in development agencies in recent years has been the strengthening of 'civil society'. For some this has led them to conclude that they should be broadening their net of partners in order to promote a democratic society. Others, although recognising it may be important to link with a whole variety of groups, warn against the assumption that simply by supporting a variety of civil society organisations a democratic society will emerge.

## **Support for Advocacy Work**

Providing the right kind of support for advocacy initiatives is particularly difficult. Funding needs to be done sensitively and in some cases may not be the most appropriate form of support. On the one hand there is a need to strengthen the capacity of those wanting to become involved in advocacy work but there is a role for other kinds of funding and when done sensitively this can be very important.

In Sudan there is a particular problem with slavery. In the short term the only way that it seemed possible to secure the freedom of those being sold as slaves required buying them so as to set them free. So we helped secure the freedom of a number of slaves through the use of northern money with agents who went in and paid the price for them and then set them free. But no one there knew that the transactions were based on the use of northern money otherwise the prices would have been greatly inflated or access refused and the operation pushed even further underground.

The churches have **different approaches** to working in advocacy. Some Protestant and Catholic churches and related NGOs are rather new to advocacy and in general their approach is still in development. In comparison the Quakers have advocacy work as central to their mission, are much more committed and have comprehensive and well established approaches. They recognise that to be involved in advocacy work requires being in for the long haul; that it is not something that you can be done as one might a neatly defined service delivery project.

When northern NGOs speak of the involvement of the Church in Africa in advocacy it is generally the Council of Churches or the Catholic Commissions that are mentioned, not the individual churches themselves. Although certain high-ranking individuals within the churches play a central role many churches are said to be uncomfortable with an advocacy role. In general the Church is a conservative body and although there are people within the Church who have an alternative vision, they are rare.

There are both advantages and disadvantages of working through the Church on advocacy issues. Several examples of church leaders leaving to set up their own NGOs outside the Church were given. For instance in Zimbabwe a former Secretary-General of the Christian Council of Zimbabwe (CCZ) left to set up his own NGO called the 'Ecumenical Support Programme'. The rationale given was that the Church had too many limitations and was too cautious when it came to politically sensitive issues and that such issues were therefore more easily and effectively dealt with outside the Church structure. The former Secretary-General is still able to maintain links with the churches and passes information to them so that they can act on it, if and how they see fit. Whilst some would argue that this is a pragmatic response to the situation and the most effective way forward in arguing against abuses of rights, social, economic or political, others argue that leaving the Church diminishes *de facto* the role that one can play. Archbishop Tutu, for instance, could not have played the role he has played inside South Africa from outside the Church. There was a feeling that until others follow his example and address politically sensitive issues from within the Church the churches' advocacy role in Africa will continue to be relatively weak.

Several people also noted the need for the accountability of the Church structures to be examined. It is not enough, they say, for the churches to rely on their moral standing, they need to be able to account for the finances.

Some of the churches and church-related bodies are doing their work very well but how can they criticise government? How can they tell the government that they are unaccountable when they can't tell their own members what they have done with their own resources?

The accountability of the churches is a real issue. Although our reporting requirements demand that they are accountable, smaller links between churches here and churches there show the problem. For instance, I have a group of friends here in Germany that I know were supporting a Catholic priest in Malawi thinking that they were his only sponsors. But it turns out he had other groups in Italy and Switzerland sending him money too. Together they donated 700,000 DM over the years for which there was never any reporting or documentation.

The **links between the Church and the State** were noted to have been both positive and negative. The Church has often provided credibility and legitimacy to States and in the African context the relationship between the two bodies is often thought to be too close for effective advocacy. Individuals' ethnic and family ties can be just as strong as those to the State or to the Church and this can lead to split loyalties, a factor given by some for the apparent reticence of the Church, in some contexts, to involve itself in advocacy *vis-à-vis* the State. Another reason given was the Church's recognition that the State in Africa is young and that it needs nurturing support rather than criticism. Others thought that because of the particularly hierarchical nature of some African societies advocacy interventions are simply less visible than they might be in the West, taking place, but in a quiet way behind closed doors.

## **Strengthening Capacities for Advocacy**

The capacity of southern partners to engage in advocacy, both their strengths and their weaknesses, is critical. There was a general feeling that the capacity for advocacy work, of the churches and church-related organisations and other NGOs, was rather weak and that southern organisations need help to strengthen their capacity. The recent anniversary partner consultations organised by DanChurchAid, Norwegian Church Aid and Christian Aid were mentioned in this regard since advocacy work was raised by southern churches and southern NGOs in these meetings as an area they wanted to see prioritised for support. A number of the partners present are said to have noted that they needed to strengthen their capacity in the field of advocacy. In order to do this, there are several important issues that northern NGOs believe southern churches and southern NGOs will have to address.

## **Types of Relationships**

Churches often have excellent **networks** linking grass-roots communities not only nationally but also globally. These links to a widespread constituency and the moral position that the Church has are of critical importance; ‘...whilst the government may be able to close down and ban NGOs they can’t close down the Church, that simply wouldn’t be possible in Africa’. Yet how effective the network is for advocacy is very much dependent upon context. Some denominations in certain countries will have more credibility than others depending on their history, their capacities and their competencies. Although the Church structure is a major advantage it can also be a disadvantage.

The problem with the structure of the church is that they can get themselves all tied up and that means that sometimes they are not able to move in time to do anything useful; ... you shouldn’t underestimate the amount of energy that goes into simply keeping the show on the road.

The **ecumenical structures** of the National Council of Churches have similar problems. Agreeing on a common position can be difficult and time-consuming. Ecumenical bodies were, nevertheless, seen as critically important for advocacy work since they allowed politically difficult statements to be made without putting any one church on the spot. Furthermore the relationship between Catholics and the members of the Council is noteworthy. While they work effectively in certain contexts and on particular issues (e.g. the joint work of the churches in South Africa and the recent Africa-wide Jubilee 2000 initiative) it is more common to find that they do not co-operate very well, perhaps due in part to the difficulties created by their rather large and cumbersome structures. Whilst linking with those outside the Church has its own difficulties the Christian Councils have the added difficulty of first bringing together their members before they are in a position to link up with others.

The churches’ international links are seen as one of its main strengths. The role played by the Church in one part of Africa has, for example, informed and provided a model for practice elsewhere on the continent. Links from Africa to Europe and elsewhere in the North also play an important solidarity function and are, of course, important in terms of funding.

### **Internal Organisational Issues**

There was a general recognition that the overall capacity of churches and related organisations for advocacy could be strengthened. The issues involved in this include: how to support an organisational development process for partners; how to measure the impact of advocacy work; how to improve accountability; the need to redress the gender imbalance; how to strengthen the churches’ political analysis; the role of theology and ideology in supporting advocacy work; and the implications of international funding and other linkages.

The importance, for instance, of supporting partners in an **organisational development** process to enable them to move from primarily service delivery activities to become more active in advocacy work, was underlined. For the churches to be effective in their advocacy work an organisational development process which

might enable them to examine the extent of fit between their theology, context and capacities might be particularly helpful. The links between the development departments and the churches of which they are part and between the local, regional and national levels of the Church and related bodies should be clarified. This is a particularly important issue for the Christian Councils. During the 1990s the directives from the World Council of Churches (WCC) and other donors was for the Councils to shift their role from that of implementor of advocacy interventions to one of facilitating the strengthening of their members' capacity for engagement in advocacy. Thus the WCC no longer talks about: 'theology dividing, service uniting', but rather about 'service dividing, theology uniting'.

There is, however, a paradox here which needs to be resolved. On the one hand donors are arguing that the grass-roots churches themselves should be involved in both development and advocacy work yet, on the other, they are demanding the kind of professional accountability which only the Central Councils and perhaps a few churches can deliver. In order for churches to be involved in implementing advocacy programmes, their capacity will need to be developed. But this takes time, as indeed it will take time for the Councils themselves to make the transition from their role of being an implementing agency to one of being a facilitator of advocacy work in the churches themselves.

The development work of individual churches has taken place mainly through development departments, which have grown very rapidly on the back of foreign funding, and in some cases have led to an **imbalance in the overall Church structure**. In some cases this caused a division between the clergy and lay people involved in carrying out the core business of the Church and those working on relatively high salaries in the development departments. In terms of future advocacy work, it will be important to resolve any difficulties that have arisen from this division since advocacy work may demand an involvement of the clergy as well as those in the development departments. One way that agencies might do this is by developing a better understanding of the informal role that clergy and lay people are already playing at the local level, rather than seeing advocacy work only as part of a formal 'programme' of the Development or Justice and Peace departments.

The **lack of a culture of professionalism** was also seen as an important issue affecting churches and NGOs involved in advocacy work. Advocacy work requires that those involved have understood and analysed the issues at stake and have an understanding of how best they might be addressed. The bishops and clergy cannot be expected to have an in-depth knowledge of a full range of issues, but it is important that they are able to mobilise those who do have and ensure that clear, concise messages get to those who need to be influenced, whether that is the general public or policy-makers.

Although the Church has a high profile in some countries it is often only a very few personalities at the top of the Church hierarchy who are actively involved in advocacy work. Whether this is to do with the nature of power relations within the Church or the lack of capacity of the majority to get involved needs to be examined:

Partners don't often have the capacity to comment on policy issues and remain general in their comments. They may criticise the international financial system in general terms but lack the capacity - the specific knowledge and strategy - to be able to do anything effective to challenge that system.

A strengthening of the **capacity of individuals** was also mentioned. Some questioned how it might be possible to move towards a time when all levels and parts of the Church are involved in advocacy work, rather than only those at the top of the Church hierarchy. Some felt nevertheless that advocacy should start with the church leadership since many societies have a strong respect for hierarchy and people look up to leaders; 'the grass roots can follow but they expect the leaders to lead'. The empowerment of local churches and communities will need a strengthening of the capacity of individuals. Churches need more effective persons not only more effective systems.

Part of the perceived problem between the development departments of churches, particularly in rural areas, and the clergy is that the training of rural clergy is generally quite poor. If this is the case it may be important for the formation of clergy to include more rigorous teaching around issues of social analysis, justice and peace and development. Contextualising and making the most effective use of the linkages between the pastoral and prophetic work of the Church has the potential to increase the effectiveness of its work.

In order to learn from what has worked and what has not work in terms of advocacy initiatives it is important that both churches and NGOs involved in advocacy work look at developing systems for **monitoring the impact of advocacy** programmes.

**Training in advocacy skills** was seen as a prerequisite for moving forward. But it was noted that training needs to be appropriate to the particular context: in different places there are different advocacy styles and different things that will work. It is important therefore to define what is meant by advocacy in different cultural contexts and to recognise that an American or European approach to advocacy might not be appropriate in other cultural contexts. The emphasis put on the skills needed for advocacy activities should perhaps be balanced with a focus on more general analytical skills needed to assess what are the major issues and contextual problems. The most important thing in terms of the capacity to do advocacy work is for those involved to have a thorough knowledge based on a sound **political analysis**.

Our partners must be aware of the political nuances and must have thought through the political implications of their work. Although as a northern donor agency we can play a facilitating role we can do little else; it's not fair for instance for us to speak out alongside our partners and then get on the plane and come home.

In addition to the need for the northern partner to have a thorough knowledge of the political situation and the social context, the need for strong research skills was emphasised.

Quite long field visits are required, or an ongoing presence in the country, because relationships with partners need to be built whilst maintaining organisational independence. It is only on the basis of really sound political analysis that you can identify who it is that you should be supporting. We tend to leave it to the Kenyans to tell us what Kenya is like and when they say this or that is happening we don't question it - we don't debate the subjectivity of the person who is gives us the information - and how that colours their analysis.

Political analysis by all involved should be ongoing and reassessed in the light of new information. For instance one organisation funding churches in the Sudan in the late 1980s felt satisfied after their initial talks that both donor and recipient were in clear agreement of the agenda; i.e. support for conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives. However, when it came down to the question of operational details they found that they, in fact, had totally different agendas. The churches actually wanted arms and food for soldiers so that the soldiers could fight for peace, an approach unacceptable to the funding agency. And some agencies, feeling the shock waves of what happened in Rwanda, are reflecting on the role they may unknowingly have played through support of the churches prior to and during the conflict.

Some felt that what is needed are tools of analysis, tools to help churches and NGOs with the job of conducting a political analysis. This should also involve understanding the issue of power; both political and social, for example, the relationship of the church to and the role of traditional village leaders and the influence of ethnicity in local power relations needs to be understood. Although good analysis is of critical importance it was acknowledged that the driving force behind many campaigns is usually politically active individuals who draw on theology to back up their arguments, but whose motivation is politically and socially rooted.

One of the key criteria used by northern NGOs in selecting organisations with which to work is their capacity or their potential to develop the capacity to undertake the proposed work. This needs to be assessed and decisions made on the basis of a sound knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the implementing agency. If necessary a programme of organisational support to strengthen the capacity of the organisation can be designed.

**Prioritisation of support for advocacy:** For northern NGOs there is always a decision to be made about what kind of support they should give and to whom. Should they prioritise doing work in complex political emergencies or should they be helping to prevent famine and conflict by supporting those in currently more stable areas requiring service delivery and community development programmes? And when should they support the advocacy work of partners? Most agencies work in different ways in different countries and have a broad mix of programmes allowing themselves to be led by the situation and their partners expressed needs. For UK agencies in particular, where NGOs are bound by their registration not to be political, the issue over when to support politically sensitive advocacy work becomes important.

Some would say that all advocacy work is political and therefore out of our remit, but in the end we think that all the work we do is political and so we simply let ourselves be led by the needs of our partners.

The need to support a mix of interventions appropriate to the context, whether it be emergency provisions, development or advocacy work, was voiced by many. Here staff in two different organisations comment.

i) We need to be involved in emergency provision as well as long-term development work. You can't do advocacy alone; you need to help with the practical things too.

ii) The main finding of the multi-donor evaluation of Rwanda was that humanitarian assistance can never substitute for political action and that we need to learn how to feed our experience in the field into international political processes quickly and effectively.

## **Concluding Comment**

The questions that northern church-related agencies are asking are: what do churches in Africa see as their role? Do they want to engage in advocacy work? Do they see it as part of their work, and if so, do they have the capacity to be effective in this area of work? Agencies are asking these questions in order to establish which groups they should be supporting, whether churches and related organisations or secular groups instead, and what form of support, financial and non-financial, they should be offering. Whilst it is, of course, important for agencies to question who they should be working with, and how, that some northern NGO staff members involved in this area of work are asking the churches what they see as their role, perhaps suggests that they have a rather limited understanding of the nature of the Church in Africa. Many acknowledge this and are concerned to find ways of strengthening their own capacity. On the other hand they are also concerned to find ways of strengthening the capacity of their partners, which it is perhaps fair to say that on balance they portrayed as being rather weak.

The next part of this report consists of country case studies which examine the role of the Church in advocating for civil and political rights as well as economic changes in Kenya, Malawi and Zambia. Although based on secondary sources primarily, in comparison, they seem to paint a rather more positive picture of the contribution of the Church in advocating for people's rights than that painted by the interviews with northern NGO staff.

# **PART II**

## **Southern Case Studies**

### **Chapter 5**

#### **Kenya:**

# **The Role of the NCKK in Advocating for Human Rights and Democracy**

This case study focuses on the role of the National Council of Churches in Kenya (NCKK) in advocating for human rights and democracy in Kenya. It is based primarily on published secondary sources although in parts it also draws on primary data gathered in the interviews conducted for this study (see Appendix 1). Advocacy work in Kenya has not been undertaken solely by the NCKK; there are various other organisations which have made a stand against government controls and which have become involved in various ways and at different times in the struggle for democracy, and these are also briefly referred to below.

The situation in Kenya as elsewhere in Africa has demonstrated a need for democratic movements from within civil society to respond to economic decline, social and political injustices and crises of legitimacy forced upon the majority of the population by the rule of an authoritarian state. Economic resentment is often aroused by the massive corruption of those in public office who are closely associated with the government and who prosper while the majority suffer. Hence the desire for political movements that can make the ruling elite accountable for their activities and that can bring about the establishment and promotion of democracy and human rights, has led to the formation of civil society organisations such as trade unions, professional associations and others. The Church recognises its position within civil society and has, at times, joined in the struggle for justice, although at other times it has opted to be either supportive of the government in authority, or has remained neutral with respect to political and socio-economic issues.

Other civic organisations have also contributed to the democratic process in Kenya. For example, in the 1980s the Law Society of Kenya and the Green Belt Movement under the leadership of Wangari Maathai stood in opposition to the one-party regime. In the 1990s some prominent political activists formed a pressure group called the Forum for Restoration of Democracy (FORD). And NGOs who had become targets of government control also added their weight in opposing the one-party government: 'on diverse issues and lent further momentum to the democratisation movement unfolding in the early 1990s' (Ndegwa 1996: 27-30).

The story of Church-State relations since the colonial period in Kenya has been marked by various forms of response by the Church,<sup>2</sup> especially under the different forms of regime that have governed the country. During the colonial administration the Church supported the government, a situation which perhaps could not have been avoided since the leaders of the Church at this period originated from the same country as the government administrators. This common origin of the church leadership and that of government played a significant role in determining the close State-Church relationship that became established; such that the Church could not criticise the government over injustices or its abuse of power. However, there were

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<sup>2</sup> The Church here refers to the mainstream missionary churches only.

two people in particular, Archbishop Beecher and Archdeacon Owen, who, during the colonial period, dared to speak out against state abuses of power. But due to a lack of joint or concerted Church action they were left to be almost lone voices in the deep silence of the rest of the Church.

After independence in 1963 it is known that the Church maintained a close relationship with the State and would not challenge any abuse of its power. At this time the church leadership in the mainline churches gradually fell to African clergy who assumed responsibility. The Church then slowly started involving itself in limited advocacy activities.

While in other countries the Church has acted through individual churches or in joint efforts of those individual churches, in Kenya the mainline Protestant churches constituted a body which brought these churches as well as para-church organisations together at the national level. This is the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) formed in 1966 which initially constituted thirty-seven mainline Protestant churches and para-church organisations related to the Church Province of Kenya (CPK) and the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) denominations. It is the main arm through which the constituent churches exercise their prophetic role<sup>3</sup> and involvement in civil society in Kenya. It should be noted, however, that in reality the exercise of the churches' prophetic role has not been through the NCCCK structure only but also through individual churchmen, church groups, individual churches and the Roman Catholic Church (which is not part of NCCCK). The Roman Catholic Church was engaged with political issues before it began joint work with the NCCCK. The NCCCK, however, as a corporate body assumed a larger pool of resources (human, capital and material) as well as a stronger voice. Consequently it was more effective in its impact and was better able to influence Church-State relations.

## **The Role the NCCCK has Played in Advocacy**

In Kenya the NCCCK is a major player in defining Church-State relations. From its inception in the 1960s and through to the 1970s, the NCCCK maintained a strong rather uncritical relationship with the government. However, there are two virtually isolated cases when it did criticise the government. The first case of advocacy was in 1966, the year of its inception, when it successfully criticised the government's proposed plan to build a prestigious and expensive headquarters in an article in its own magazine, *Target*. As a result these plans were shelved. The second situation was in 1970 when NCCCK criticised the promulgation of the Hanging Act. Also at certain times it gave support to individually initiated voices of protest against government injustices. For example, it supported to Henry Okullu in 1969 in his condemnation of tribal *oathings*<sup>4</sup> that followed the political murder of Tom Mboya which caused

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<sup>3</sup> The prophetic role of the churches is referred to here as the churches' involvement in speaking out on political and socio-economic issues of injustice and oppression.

<sup>4</sup> 'oathings': When members of an ethnic group are required to take an oath or swear to bind themselves to particular practices or actions. The oathings referred to here are those taken by the Kikuyu tribe in Kenya wherein they swore to keep the government of Kenya in the hands of the Kikuyu, i.e. they bound themselves never to let power out of the Kikuyu hands.

serious tribal divisions. The condemnation was first supported by local Christians of the East African Revival Movement and it is noted as the first occasion when the Church exercised its prophetic function.

Apart from those isolated protests against the government, the NCCCK otherwise focused its activities on addressing socio-economic rather than political issues, operating within a government framework in terms of its objectives. However, it had freedom from the government to initiate some major undertakings especially in the field of development. Ngunyi identifies three categories into which its development activities fell, namely: Christian Education and Training; Relief, Rehabilitation and Resettlement; and Christian Service and Urban Development (Ngunyi 1995: 164). In the Education and Training Programme it was involved in both formal and informal education and was able to identify the plight of youth, an issue which it responded to by initiating the 'Village Polytechnic' programmes. These programmes became very popular, even with the government who later undertook running them. There was also an involvement in civic education; on this the NCCCK collaborated with other religious bodies. These civic education programmes were later (mid-1980s and early 1990s) to become vital in educating and preparing civil society for multi-party elections and democratic government.

Other important NCCCK undertakings included the setting up of projects such as Rural Training Centres for farmer training in modern methods of farming; and the provision of social services and economic inputs for those operating in the informal sector in urban areas. Through all these programmes the NCCCK functioned as an intermediary between the churches and the government (Chepkwony 1987: 146).

In all these development efforts the NCCCK's contribution was not geared towards fundamental change of power relations. It only shifted from relief work to long-term projects within a system that was devoid of political participation and economic and social justice. The NCCCK was taken up by the 'trickle-down' paradigm in which it assumed that with development efforts people's lives would be improved and thereafter continue to function. In addition people would manage their lives within the given structural set-up of power only if some development possibilities were given to them and if they would only work a little harder (Chepkwony 1987: 225).

The position adopted by the NCCCK worked in favour of government thinking which was that the churches should concentrate on development and keep out of politics. In its development operations the NCCCK covered a broader spectrum of activities because of its ability to attract funding from a wide range of international and national donors. It thus followed that it was able to engage itself and its member churches in development much more than ever before because of its strong ties with the government and donors. However, a situation was created wherein the Church functioned as a loyalist political structure in which religious leaders were used only to pacify people by teaching them to be law-abiding citizens; the churches essentially providing alternative electioneering platforms through their strong support for state power. In fact during the Kenyatta regime the Church was faced with the challenge of

the political philosophy of *harambee*.<sup>5</sup> It was common for church leaders and politicians to play partnership roles in national and church functions including raising funds through *harambee* meetings. It was normal that during national days senior church clerics would sit on the same dais as the head of State, and some would be asked to pray before the president spoke (Githiga 1997: 90). Church leaders enjoyed State protection and some managed to accumulate material property both from their favourable position with government and from project funding through international donors. At this same time the NCCCK General-Secretary, John Kamau, was a very close friend of the president which worked to strengthen the close relationship of the Church and the State. The NCCCK was therefore not able to address any political issues directly. For example, the NCCCK's reaction to the political murder of a prominent politician J. M. Kariuki, which aroused a cry for justice nationwide, was to commission David Gitari, not then a prominent church cleric, to give a series of homilies on the sanctity of life. This was meant in a way not to embarrass the leaders who were friendly with the government, and the NCCCK itself did not make any statement. Instead the NCCCK took *harambee* very seriously and worked closely with the government to eradicate 'ignorance, poverty and disease', the three key issues which the government had prioritised for action.

The NCCCK was seen as no longer distinct from any other secular or philanthropic organisation. This scenario made NCCCK and church leadership impotent and unable to fulfil their prophetic function. The Church became blind to the social evils of corruption, nepotism, tribalism and landlessness that affected its flock and the whole of society, and it did not develop a theology in response to injustice and abuse of power.

After Kenyatta, from 1978 the NCCCK found itself commissioned to undertake a theological study of the three words, love, peace and unity, underlying the new political philosophy of *Nyayo*<sup>6</sup> adopted by Moi, the new president. This study was co-ordinated by David Gitari, then bishop and chairman of the NCCCK. Meanwhile the Kenya Ministry of Education delegated the NCCCK, through its department of Christian Churches Education Association, together with the Catholic secretariat to prepare a joint Religious Education Syllabus for schools and colleges. The express purpose here was to get the message of *Nyayo* alongside religious education to young minds and also to church-goers, which amounts to 80% of the total population (Githiga 1997: 140). The ultimate aim was to help the president attain his goals. The NCCCK worked hard to produce a theological interpretation of the *Nyayo* philosophy which led them to produce a book entitled *A Christian View of Politics in Kenya: Love, Peace and Unity* published by Uzima Press in 1983.

The Church for its part was delighted with this exercise and expressed high expectations that the theological interpretation would contribute towards good governance, based on Christian principles. However, the government manipulated the situation, involving the Church in such a way that it almost became a department of

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<sup>5</sup> 'Harambee' is a Swahili word meaning literally 'let us come together' but it became a government instituted slogan to describe a self-help system that was to guarantee the provision of essential social services in rural areas.

<sup>6</sup> 'Nyayo' is a Swahili word meaning 'footsteps'. Moi adopted this slogan to explain his aim to follow in the steps laid by Kenyatta.

the State. In other words while their theological interpretation of the national guiding philosophy was intended to influence government policies for good Christian governance, the president was in effect co-opting the council into a position whereby they would not be able to criticise the government. Indeed, the Church did fail to address social, political and economic issues that later became root causes of major problems in the country. At the same time divisions within the NCK membership contributed to a weakening of the Church's voice (Githiga 1997: 146).

It was not until 1986 when the government introduced a new method of voting by queuing which replaced the secret ballot system, that the Church realised it had to speak out against the government. The NCK took the lead by calling a pastor's conference which was attended by 1200 pastors, chaired by Bishop David Gitari, in which the queuing method was discussed and challenged. This challenge came in the form of a statement drafted by Bishop Gitari and signed by the NCK General-Secretary, and it was dispatched to the press. It won so much public support that the government was forced to exempt the church leaders, armed forces and other senior cadres of civil servants from queuing. From the government's point of view such a move was intended to quieten church leaders from further protests until the election period.

However, the Church was not that easily silenced, for at this time the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) gave its strong support to the NCK protest through a thorough and more representative open letter to the president written by the Catholic bishops. In this letter, the bishops condemned queuing as a method of forcing people into compromising their preferences out of fear of their superiors. The bishops expressed their duty to warn the president of the divisiveness inherent in the queuing system. From this point on the NCK has continued to work together with the RCC to address political issues that threaten the lives of Kenyans.

Some of the more prominent issues that followed included land-grabbing; eviction of the poor in order to provide for the rich; tribal bloodletting clashes, especially in the Rift Valley area; and mass property accumulation by politicians, in particular those close to President Moi.

It became obvious during this time that the relationship between the Church (represented by NCK and RCC) and the State had crumbled. The president realised that he could no longer enlist the co-operation of NCK. What he did in response - a common response in such situations - was to seek the assistance of others who could both support the government's position and undermine the position of those who opposed the government. The president is therefore thought to have created an alliance with the Evangelical Fellowship of Kenya (EFK) (Ngunyi 1995). The EFK is comprised of the African Inland Church (AIC), the Reformed Church of East Africa (RCEA), the Kenya Assemblies of God (KAG), and the African Gospel Church (AGC). Ethnically EFK is composed of a feeble Luo-Kalenjin alliance with the Kalenjin being dominant, thus tending to give support to the regime of president Moi who is a Kalenjin. EFK was registered in 1976, but did not become operational until 1980 when its secretariat was established. It did not enter the limelight until 1990-91, after a visit of its leadership to State House, which resulted in its being co-opted by the government to counter the activities of NCK.

On the other hand the NCCCK is, as already mentioned, comprised of the Church Province of Kenya (CPK) and the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA). The NCCCK is a multi-ethnic institution with a strong influence from Luo and Kikuyu, Embu and Meru ethnic groups. Ngunyi argues that: 'During the push for political pluralism in Kenya, the status of EFK was enhanced (through state patronage) in order to rival the activities of NCCCK' (Ngunyi 1995: 123). Thus the position taken by the EFK during the process of liberalisation has been one of consoling the State rather than confronting it, while receiving prebends (clerical stipends) in return. During the 1992 election period the EFK was tacitly 'contracted' by the regime to disorganise the activities of NCCCK.

Because most Kenyans attend church this move created a polarisation of civic society along church lines. The result was a growing rivalry between the two church institutions with increasing attacks from EFK leadership about the NCCCK's criticism of the government. Despite all that NCCCK and RCC leaders continued to speak out, championed at times by the individual leaders such as Rev. Timothy Njoya of PCEA, Bishops Muge, Gitari and Okullu of CPK and Bishop Ndingi Mwana a'Nzeki of the Catholic diocese Nakuru. Often they received support from the press. The media carried press releases, pastoral letters and Sunday sermons delivered by key church leaders, though sometimes amidst attacks from the government.

The NCCCK's ability to raise issues with the government was often enhanced by its ability to provide clearly documented evidence of such issues. For example, in the 1988 rigging of the general election, some pastors of the CPK diocese of Eldoret led by Bishop Muge took the courageous step of collecting data from Tinderet constituency where there had been threats of intimidation if the constituents did not vote for a certain candidate - Mr Segoo, against the incumbent MP, Mr Henry Kosgey. The survey was carried out by three pastors and the results were that Mr Segoo had a total of 3341 votes and the incumbent MP Mr Kosgey had a total of 9385 votes (Githiga 1997: 164). The outcome was that Mr Segoo with a lower total vote was declared the winner. NCCCK published the results in its magazine *Beyond*, which incurred government wrath to the end. The editor of the magazine Mr Bedan Mbugwa was imprisoned and the magazine was proscribed (Githiga 1997: 166).

At the same time Bishop David Gitari of the Diocese of Mt Kenya East, instructed the director of the church's Christian Community Services to facilitate the collection of data in Kirinyaga District. From the information gathered it was established that only 25% of the electorate participated in the polls. Gitari writes that 'owing to massive rigging of elections it is alleged that 75% of the present parliamentarians were not popularly elected and as Bishop Henry Okullu put it: 'they are in parliament by selection not by election' (Gitari 1991: 16). It also came to pass that the majority of candidates with longer queues were declared losers while those with shorter queues were declared winners (Githiga 1997: 167).

The period of the mid-1980s and after marked the Churches' most effective activity in opposing State abuse of power. In the absence of any effective opposition in parliament, the Church, through the NCCCK, stood out as the sole opposition against the government. The NCCCK strongly condemned the government and its abuse of

power, such as: passing resolutions without proper debates (for example, the declaration of the one-party state was done after only 45 minutes!); rigging of elections; misuse of public property and other social ills. The NCK led by opposing the one-party state while advocating democratic multi-party elections and was later joined by professional societies and opposition dissidents. The Church, led by Bishop Gitari and utilising knowledge of the legal profession, refined its political theology. It made a critical analysis of some biblical passages such as the book of Romans, chapter 13, which it set against the book of Revelations, chapter 13, and added a passage in the book of Mark, chapter 12, verse 17, and developed a prophetic theory which guarded its actions. The Church recognised that politics was about people's welfare and claimed that it was ridiculous for politicians to expect church leaders to remain in ivory towers and merely spectate (Githiga 1997: 187, see also Githari 1991: 9). Politics to the Church was too important to be left to the politicians alone. The Church was to realise that the State was failing to protect its citizens, and instead was manipulating them as in Revelations 13, where it becomes the beast and an apostate authority that needs to be resisted and dethroned. The Church was to articulate that God's authority was superior to State authority which must operate within limits. Where the State violates those limits hence clashing with God's authority, then loyalty to God's authority must come first.

In turn government politicians adopted a defensive stance and challenged the Church's legitimacy in political involvement. Virulent attacks were made against church leaders among whom Bishop Gitari was victim of the worst of these attacks. Bishop Gitari's mistake was that he preached politically hard-hitting sermons, one of which he took from the biblical book of Daniel, chapter 6 and applied to the Kenyan situation, to the bitterest taste of the government. He also wrote articles on Church-State relations which were carried by the press but censored by the government who labelled them as bordering on sedition (Gitari 1991:14, see also Gitari 1988). The bishop, in addition, had many international links which the government did not like. The barrage of attacks from politicians, strengthened by the religious forces mobilised by Moi (led by Bishop Birech of AIC and Bishop Gitonga of the Redeemed Gospel Church, both with strong roots in Moi's home area) continued and became so severe that eight member churches of the NCK withdrew their membership in 1991 (Gitari 1991: 16, see also Ngunyi 1995: 151).

In 1991 the NCK, working closely with the RCC, created a Department of Justice and Peace with which it was determined to continue fighting State injustices through a programme of educating people about their political rights and democracy. The creation of this department enabled the NCK to define more clearly their advocacy activities. In fact, it was after this that the NCK set up an advocacy programme with the major objective to 'promote an interpretation and application of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a way that gives meaning in the daily lives of people thus creating a united just and sustainable society' (NCK 1996: 1). Activities undertaken as given by the Progress Report for the year January-December 1996, fell under five specific objectives, namely:

1. help churches identify, analyse and disseminate information on global, national and local issues that influence their daily lives;

2. facilitate research on two or three national issues and encourage a common approach among churches;
3. work towards an inclusive interpretation of the Gospel which leads to social action;
4. promote and advocate for protection of human rights and natural social responsibilities; and
5. build churches' capacity to process for the creation of a just society. (NCCK 1996: 1-5)

For these activities NCCK received (as of 31st December 1996) 99.3% of its income from eleven overseas donors - a total of K. Shs 20,521,744.00 as opposed to local contribution in income of K. Shs 145,380.00. Of these foreign donors the largest were Norwegian Church Aid (K. Shs 5.1 mill.); Bread for the World (K. Shs 4.4 mill.); United Church of Canada (K. Shs 3.3 mill.); and Church of Sweden Mission (K. Shs. 1.1 mill.) (NCCK 1996: 7).

This heavy overseas reliance on funding had both negative and positive impacts (see later sections on strengths and weaknesses). Among the benefits was the external support NCCK received during the push for multi-party democracy. As NCCK applied pressure internally, the international community, especially foreign donors, also added their pressure, suspending aid to Kenya at their Paris meeting in 1992 pending the acceleration of both economic and political reforms and the improvement of Kenya's human rights. This combined local and international pressure forced the president to call a conference for government party delegates in which it resolved to get backing for the introduction of a multi-party political system in early 1991. It also led to more constitutional amendments by the National Assembly and the announcement of multi-party elections to take place in March 1993 (Githiga 1997: 202).

This was the change the majority of Kenyans had been demanding for a long time, but it was acknowledged that local people needed information on how to handle this change. The NCCK saw this as a challenge and resolved to make a significant contribution. They set up a programme of 'Education for Participatory Democracy' which aimed to inform people how they could become responsible and informed citizens in the affairs of the nation. Through its Justice and Peace Department, the NCCK produced literature which was circulated throughout the country in the form of posters, leaflets, pamphlets and booklets. Among the booklets were such titles as 'Toward Multiparty Democracy in Kenya'; 'Multiparty Electoral Process in Kenya'; 'NCCK Education for Participatory Democracy Project.'; 'Justice, Peace and Reconciliatory Programme'; and, 'Why you should Vote'. The main themes of this literature included:

1. democracy as a way of life;
2. understanding multi-party democracy in Kenya;
3. the role of opposition in multi-party parliament; and,
4. participation in elections. (Githiga 1997: 211).

By creating an awareness amongst people of their political rights and imbuing a new understanding of democracy into Kenyan society at large they hoped that this would

empower people to become politically active. They hoped they through explaining the meaning of democracy, what it entails as well as the need for individual participation in democratic processes, they would contribute to the emergence of a more democratic society.

The NCKK contribution in bringing about a multi-party political system in the country has been seen as the Churches' major prophetic contribution in the history of the Christian Church in Kenya. The most prominent aspects of its role in the political transition have been:

1. forcing a dialogue between government and the opposition especially through the media and the government's own instituted Kenya Review Committee (KRC);
2. bringing pressure on the government to repeal Section 2A of the constitution which instituted the one-party system, in order to return the country to a multiparty system; and
3. launching a teaching programme through which citizens were educated to defend themselves against manipulation by those in power and to fully participate in the democratic process.

In anticipation of the general elections on 29th December 1992, the NCKK together with RCC formed the National Ecumenical Civil Education Programme (NECEP). Through this programme the two partners were able to dispatch election monitors to all of the 188 constituencies throughout the country. However, during the elections these monitors were rendered helpless to prevent the open rigging of the elections that resulted. In the event of the incumbent government being returned to power, there were some pre-election failures the Church made which are worth mentioning. First, the Church failed to increase the pressure for the appointment of an Electoral Commission which was neutral. Secondly, the Church did not challenge the unilateral appointment by the president of an unsuitable candidate for chairman of the Electoral Commission. Thirdly, the Church failed to mediate between the divided opposition, since it claimed to stand on neutral ground. Kenya needed a political force strong enough to challenge the system that had failed to guarantee good governance: a united opposition free from ethnic or religious fragmentation was what was needed.

Despite the resulting irregularities and failure to remove the party in government, the NCKK continued to distance itself from the State and question the State's unlimited power over its citizens. The Church became more vigilant and vocal than ever before. For example in April 1996 a row developed between the Catholic bishop of Nakuru, Ndingi Mwana'a Nzeki, and the Provincial Commissioner (PC) of the Rift Valley area over the claims the bishop made about imminent ethnic clashes in Molo. This became a contentious issue involving the president; indeed the whole government supported the position of the PC who stated that the bishop had lied. The press picked it up; it was featured, for example, in the *Nation* newspaper, 20th, 22nd, 23rd, 24th April 1996, and was also extensively debated in the cover story of the *Weekly Review* magazine, 26th April 1996. The Catholic Church, its youth groups, numerous other churches (especially NCKK members) and opposition politicians and lawyers backed up the bishop by requesting the government to withdraw its statement that the bishop had lied. The Rev. Dr Timothy Njoya, a Presbyterian, is quoted by the *Nation*, 22nd

April, 1996, as warning: 'the church can organise a march on State House and demand the resignation of President Moi if no action is taken against the Rift Valley PC ... The whole church can walk to State House and demand the resignation of the President himself as happened to (former Philippines president) Ferdinand Marcos.' The following day the press bore a message which effectively withdrew the statement by the PC.

Another example of a joint call by the NCKK and the RCC for constitutional reforms occurred in May 1997. The *Nation*, 23rd May, 1997, reported: 'The Church yesterday gave the government an ultimatum to effect minimum constitutional reforms before the General Election or face unspecified action.' The leaders of the Catholic and Protestant churches were concerned that time was running out. The General Election was due to take place at the end of the year, yet no action had been taken by the government to review the constitution to set the stage for fair and free elections. Church leaders therefore established a reform team, led by Archbishop David Gitari, which included religious leaders and opposition politicians and the civic lobby (*Nation* 14th August 1997). Talks with the government took place but the outcome was not acceptable to the church leaders. This time the initiative came from the twenty two Catholic bishops, who were reported in the *Nation*, 8th November 1997, as saying that 'the reform bills just assented by President Moi were inadequate for a free and fair General Election and called for an extension of the life of Parliament to enact further reforms including a limitation of the powers of the President.'

The Church's role, particularly through the NCKK from the mid-1980s to the 1990s, has been shown to be one of defending the vulnerable in society, both Christians and non-Christians alike, by pressing the government to be more accountable to its citizens. Rev. Samuel Kobia, a recent general-secretary of NCKK, made a statement that befits a concluding remark. He said that

... the NCKK has endeavoured, and will continue to do so, to enrich the national debate for democracy and good governance. For there can be no economic development in anarchy ... the key planks of good governance are level and political stability, institutional capacity for policy formation and implementation, checks and balances necessary to ensure transparency in policy formulation and implementation and accountability at both political and administrative levels. ... The church must stand firm and maintain a strong calm voice to help assure that democratisation and constitutional crises do not precipitate chaos. (Kobia 1993: 48)

In its advocacy role the NCKK has shown strengths that ensured success as well as weaknesses that hindered or reduced their degree of success.

## **Strengths of the NCKK**

The NCKK is an institution constituted by a number of churches and church organisations. Collectively the NCKK members have a very large and broadly based grass-roots constituency. The advantages of this include having a strong base of

support, an augmented voice and wide access to resources, human and material capital (Bratton 1994).

The independent nature of the NCCCK is also a major strength. The NCCCK has always assumed an independent stance *vis-à-vis* the State. It therefore became, given the lack of political opposition within parliament, virtually the only effective arm of opposition against the government during the period of one-party rule. The Church was better positioned than other bodies, groups or individuals to organise, for example, demonstrations that would be feared by the government. Besides church leaders were not on the government payroll and so did not fear reprisals by the State concerning their jobs and businesses in the way that other organisations and individuals did.

With these groups and individuals the government used its economic power to suppress people's public opinion, and applied financial constraints to make those on the government payroll compromise their political positions. This lent strength to the Churches' voice in opposing the government.

The NCCCK also has unlimited access to the national press as well as having its own publications through which statements and vital information was and still is publicised. These are used internally within Kenya but also abroad. The first time the NCCCK exercised its prophetic function was through the publication of a statement in its own magazine *Target*.

One of the outstanding features of the NCCCK's success is the high educational levels of its leadership. Many of the leaders of member churches, especially of CPK and PCEA, held higher degrees from well-known secular and theological institutions primarily in the UK and the USA. The NCCCK secretariat staff are also well educated in a variety of disciplines (Ngunyi 1995: 169-170). This is an invaluable asset to the NCCCK in that its advocacy activities require a proper understanding and rigorous analysis of multi-disciplinary issues. Such rigour is necessary in order to produce water-tight and documented evidence in advocacy cases. Their academic credibility also enables them to link up with other professionals whose skills are needed for its educational programmes.

The excellent leadership provided by its directors during the period under discussion cannot be ignored. Without such skilled and astute leadership it would not have been possible for the NCCCK to address, so successfully, some of the more complicated and sensitive situations it has faced.

The NCCCK has strong international links; in 1996, for example, more than 99% of its income came from foreign donors. From its inception, the NCCCK has assumed a high profile attracting considerable international attention (Ngunyi 1995: 132, see also Chepkwony, 1987: 207). This has enabled the development of a long-term relationship with foreign donors, and may have contributed to the positive response of foreign donors in putting pressure on the Kenyan government for democratic reform. Availability of funding from a wide spectrum of donors has enabled the NCCCK to cover a broad range of socio-political and developmental activities. This may also have contributed to its national popularity.

## **Weaknesses of the NCKK**

Many have pointed to the overdependency of the NCKK on foreign assistance. This has perhaps caused the NCKK to consider the preferences of foreign donors, rather than communities, in determining its development priorities. Such dependency reduces its ability to determine its own policy objectives and priorities. When projects the NCKK had been running with communities were closed down because the donor reduced or withdrew their funding, local people have been affected. And in some cases church members who are responsible for the projects have become distanced from their local congregations and have been accused, rightly or wrongly, of looking after their own interests first. The question some are asking of the NCKK is whose agenda ought to take precedence?

In the past the NCKK has perhaps been a victim of its success in that the large sums of money it has had access to has forced it to expand rather rapidly. To be effective, however, the appropriate organisational systems and structures need to be in place. That in itself takes time and resources, resources which some donors would perhaps rather see allocated to projects. This is a tension inherent in many development partnerships but especially relevant to the NCKK as the position it occupies in Kenyan society makes it particularly popular with donors.

The independent nature of the central administration of the NCKK affects its relationships with member churches sometimes causing tensions and differences of opinion, not only between the NCKK and its constituent churches but also between the constituent churches. This can lead to a weakening of its position and thus the impact of its actions (Chepkwony 1987: 143). Administrative overcentralisation has an added disadvantage in that it is possible to become detached from the grass roots as time passes.

The question of who the NCKK is owned by and accountable to has at times been raised. This question needs to be posed because, despite the fact that the NCKK is a membership organisation, nearly all of its funding comes from foreign donors. So, is it accountable to donors or to their membership? It is a disturbing fact that churches are regarded as unaccountable. This has sometimes led these institutions to become objects of corrupt practice.

## **Conclusion**

This case study has presented a profile of the advocacy activities of NCKK in Kenya. The account conveys the form of relationship the NCKK has had with the State at different periods and to what extent that relationship has determined the nature of their advocacy work. It is argued that when that relationship was close advocacy work by NCKK was highly restricted but that when its relationship was more independent from government it was better able to engage in advocacy activities. In its work the NCKK has exhibited both strengths and weaknesses which have influenced its degree of success.



# Chapter 6

## Malawi:

### The Role of the Churches in the Democratic Transition

#### Introduction

Malawi, one of the last formal one-party states in Africa, was ruled by the autocratic and eccentric dictator Life President Hastings Kamuzu Banda from 1964 (when Malawi gained independence from Britain) until he was outvoted in the country's first democratic elections in 1994. Whilst the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the beginnings of dissent against his government's policies by various individuals and groups, it was the Malawian Catholic bishops' pastoral letter issued on 8th March 1992 which is widely thought to have signalled the beginning of the end for the regime. The letter, signed personally by all the bishops, called for far-reaching economic and political reforms. It was the first time since the country had gained independence that a Malawian organisation had made a public criticism of the Malawi Congress Party (MCP). It struck a chord with people's experiences and by 'breaking the silence' set the process of reform in motion (Ross 1995a; Newell 1995)

Indeed the letter is seen as a document of such importance 'that, in common parlance, modern Malawian history is divided between "before the pastoral letter" and "since the pastoral letter"' (Ross 1995b: 98). More than 16,000 copies of the letter were printed and read in all 130 Catholic parishes in Malawi. Every Catholic parish has several smaller churches attached to the main church, thus it is conceivable that the letter was read out in more than 1,000 churches throughout the country (Cullen 1994: 5). The letter outlined the increasing inequalities between the rich and the poor; the spread of corruption; the serious flaws that existed with the education system; the cuts in healthcare; the denial of basic freedoms; the blatant injustices such as the detention without trial; and severe inadequacies in the judicial system (the bishops' pastoral letter was published in Malawi as 'Living our Faith', March 1992 and as 'The Truth Will Set You Free' by CIIR, London, September 1992).

This chapter examines the role of the churches in Malawi in advocating for political reform and democratisation. It looks briefly at the history of the church in Malawi, particularly with respect to its pre- and post-independence advocacy role. It then turns to an examination of the factors that led to the process of political transformation. Thus the role of the churches is placed in the context of actions by other groupings and its strengths and weaknesses discussed.

#### The History of the Churches in Malawi

Malawi is predominantly Christian. A series of missionary arrivals during the nineteenth century established Christianity as the main religion in Malawi, although there is also a Muslim minority. The current president is, however, Muslim and the profile of the Islamic faith, the Muslim minority and the importance of links to other Islamic states are therefore likely to be of increasing importance.

Historically Malawi was divided geographically between the various Christian denominations, each settling in different parts of the country and approaching their work in rather different ways. The first Catholic mission was established in Malawi in 1889. But they were late arriving, the area having been evangelised by the preceding Protestant missions which established themselves in the area from 1861. Thus the Catholics found themselves working on the margins of society, for instance with the immigrant Alomwe and Sena. They are said to have cared for lepers and orphans and condemned men in Zomba goal and to have championed the rights of women. They struggled to establish themselves: 'fighting for every inch of territory and penny of Government aid, triumphalist yet among the poorest members of society' (Linden 1974). The Scottish Presbyterians were particularly influential in Malawi. They came from urban backgrounds and saw education as the route to self-improvement: 'Access to mission schools and membership of the Presbyterian Church provided certain Malawians with the opportunity to acquire jobs and influence that they would not otherwise have possessed' (McCracken, 1977). Yet they lacked access to the opportunities which were afforded their western missionary colleagues and this led to resentment among the educated, several of the most influential leaving to create independent churches (Ross 1996).

With education at the heart of the Presbyterian's approach, urban areas grew up around the missions. Blantyre, for instance, grew up around the Church of Scotland Mission. The Independent Churches and the Catholic Church on the other hand tended to establish themselves initially in rural areas and were rather more conservative in their approach.

## **The Churches' Political Role Pre-independence**

In the years leading to independence it was the Catholic Church which spoke out about political matters. The Malawi Congress Party (MCP) accused the Roman Catholic Church and Archbishop Theunissen, in particular, of supporting and being the force behind the creation of the supposedly 'reactionary' Christian Democratic Party (CDP), formed in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The house of the leader of the CDP, Chester Katsonga, was fire bombed and a vitriolic attack was made on the Catholics in an eleven-page article in the *Malawi News*, an official organ of the MCP. The paper said:

If the Roman Catholic Church has not learnt any lesson from the religious wars they have had in Europe and their expulsions from many countries of the world, they will be taught a lesson that they will never forget in this country of Malawi. They should remember that the African people of this country who are members of the Roman Catholic Church are Malawian nationalists first

and if they have any allegiance at all to the Pope, that comes after they have performed their duty to their country ... We shall not tolerate any church to meddle in Malawian politics. The pulpit shall be distinct from the political platform. (Chakanza 1995: 60)

Archbishop Thuenissen refuted the accusation and responded to the attack by writing a statement which was read on 31st October 1960 in all Catholic Churches across the country. On the issue of human rights it said that

... it is definitely Our obligation to make known to all the laws of God upon which every society must be built and to safeguard the human rights that have been given to all by God and which no ruler can take away from His people. Not only are we bound to advise on these laws and rights but We are also obliged to oppose any action contrary to them.

Katsonga, the leader of the CDP, also wrote a statement at the time warning that 'if the Malawi Congress Party came to power and formed a government, the people would have moved from one form of oppression by the whitemen to another by Dr Banda' (Katsonga quoted in Chakanza 1995: 63). Yet the incident, unlike the 1992 pastoral letter, did not have international or even national appeal perhaps because it was interpreted as a case of quite normal political rivalry.

The Catholic Church spoke out again in 1961, in the period when Malawi was preparing for independence. The bishops issued a twenty-six page letter: 'How to Build a Happy Nation', focusing primarily on Church-State relationships. It noted that the role of the State and the Church should be complementary, they could co-operate but remain distinct. The role of the Church being to ensure that the government ruled in a proper and 'Godly' way: 'Justice and reason itself forbid the State to be godless or to adopt a course of action which would be godless'. The letter not only established the degree to which the Catholic Church would be prepared to co-operate with any future government but also sent a very clear message to the MCP which challenged it to form a democratic government should it come to power.

## **Church-State Relations Post-independence: 1964-1992**

During Banda's rule the relationship between the Church and the State was one of tacit or open support; they very rarely challenged his abuse of power. This is perhaps partly due to his government's extremely heavy handed response to any criticism. But the lack of unity between the churches may also have allowed Banda to keep a tight reign on their activities.

Church members in urban areas, particularly from Presbyterian congregations, were to become those most closely involved in politics by taking up positions of power. Graduates from Catholic secondary schools also emerged as influential figures in the 1940s and 1950s and they too took up technocratic positions. Yet at independence it was

the Presbyterians and other Protestants ...that threw their lot in with Banda. In their 'Livingstonian outlook' (one that held that one was improved by education and that it was the duty of the educated to lead the uneducated) their interest in and progress through education was channelled to serve the interests of the new nation. (Lwanda 1996: 89)

It was in particular the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP) that formed the closest relationship to government after independence and

...became so assimilated with the government's activities that the Synod was often invited to pray and participate as a Church at various government functions. However, because of this assimilation and alignment with the MCP, the Church gradually lost its ability to admonish or speak pastorally to the government. (Ross 1993)

The personal association that Banda had with the Church was significant in that it lent him spiritual authority and thus legitimacy. Whilst in Scotland in 1941 he was ordained by the Church of Scotland. Banda is said to have set great store by the fact that he could claim to be an elder of the Church of Scotland because of the status it lent him as a respected member of the community. His age and this status as an elder of the church, particularly in rural areas, afforded him ongoing support (Forster 1994; quoted in Newell 1995: 250). But it was not only in rural areas of Malawi that Banda maintained this air of spiritual authority. Leading Presbyterians in Scotland continued to see Banda as a 'sound religious man' and when delegations of the Church visited Malawi the meetings held were seen as being between Church leaders. CCAP clergy in rural areas rarely had the opportunity of meeting with such delegations and therefore communicating their concerns to them (Newell 1995: 250).

It was not only the CCAP which lent support to the government; the annual independence day celebrations, for instance, were officiated at by Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Seven-Day Adventists, as well as by Muslims and Hindus. Such widespread and tacit acceptance of the status quo made it extremely difficult for any religious group to speak out (Lwanda 1996).

The Catholics, although apparently silenced for a period of thirty years, were nevertheless gradually developing their ideas about their involvement in social and political affairs in line with other changes both within and outside the Church. Internally they were involved in a process of restructuring the institution and in renewing church life in general. This was part of the Vatican II decree which took the social context as its starting point and placed a commitment to justice and peace at the heart of the way it was to work. And, unlike some of the other churches who wholeheartedly backed Banda, the Catholics did not forge such strong links with the government. However, because of the totalitarian nature of the State they were unable to have any very meaningful dialogue with the government on social and human rights issues despite their central involvement in the provision of social services (educational, medical and other) (Chakanza 1995).

Yet members of the Catholic Church did not remain totally silent. The archbishop of Blantyre once told his congregation that it was dehumanising to have to praise Banda

for the benefits he was supposedly bestowing upon them whilst they were clearly struggling simply to survive (Chakanza 1995). And in 1980 Archbishop Chiona blamed MCP MPs for not telling the president about the severe famine that was afflicting the Blantyre and Chiradzulo areas. Such incidents provoked a strong response from the government; in the latter case, for instance, the archbishop and other bishops were detained by the government and put on trial. Again in 1983 Bishop Mkhori took a stance against the government by insisting on performing the funeral rites for one of the 'Mwanza four' - MPs critical of the MCP leadership who died in a car crash that is thought to have been orchestrated by the MCP hierarchy. No churchmen of any denomination made clear statements about the incident. It has been suggested that their silence can be attributed to an absence of: '... a real spirit of ecumenism among them. While they co-operated at the level of the social services and joint prayers on public occasions, there was a complete lack of any serious dialogue at a level that might influence public affairs' (Lwanda 1996: 90). Although there were occasional acts of bravery by the churches these were largely in isolation and came out of a context of divisive inter-denominational and inter-faith competition. This lack of church solidarity was one of the factors which allowed Banda to rule virtually unchallenged.

### **Factors Leading up to 8th March 1992 Pastoral Letter:**

A wide range of factors created the climate for the pastoral letter to be written. The primary force was people's growing discontent at the deep poverty and lack of civil and political rights afflicting the nation. However, there were forces at work outside Malawi which made the climate for change ripe: the end of the Cold War and concern internationally regarding abuses of human rights; the democratic transitions taking place in neighbouring countries; and the action of exiled Malawian opposition movements. And inside Malawi the churches were just one of the groups pushing against a weakening leader and party; students, members of the Law Society and those involved in the press were also becoming more active.

The end of the Cold War had changed the political climate substantially. It was no longer acceptable to support dictatorships that had no regard for human rights. Lwanda argues that although the end of the Cold War did not have such a great force in other parts of Africa, where change was already well under way, in Malawi '... it was glasnost ... which induced the "Aid for human rights" campaign" by the Western donors' (Lwanda 1996: 62). Malawi, an ally of the West during the Cold War, was now an embarrassment to Western powers. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Harare in October 1991 voiced its concern about Malawi's human rights record, as did a number of donor countries. The release of political detainees in 1991 brought about by pressure from donor governments particularly in Germany, Denmark and the UK temporarily halted the withdrawal of aid. However, in November of that year the European Community set strict political and human rights conditions for future receipt of aid, a threat which was acted upon the following year.

Other international organisations such as Amnesty International and Africa Watch also contributed to an increasing awareness internationally of the lack of democracy

and abuse of human rights within Malawi. Africa Watch published a report in 1990 titled 'Where Silence Rules: The Suppression of Dissent in Malawi'. This was given, amongst others, to the Apostolic Nuncio then based in Zambia in the hope that it would galvanise the Catholics into action. Amnesty International also issued various reports which revealed the severity of some of the government's abuses of human rights. For instance, 'Malawi: Human Rights Violations 25 Years After Independence', 1989; 'Malawi: Prison Conditions, Cruel Punishment and Detention without Trial', 1992. The BBC and the SABC's channel Africa may also have been influential in broadcasting debates about the emergence of multi-party democracies in other parts of Africa (Lwanda 1996: 92).

The influence that international development NGOs working in Malawi for many years may have had in alerting their own governments to the situation in Malawi is not discussed in the literature. They may have played a role but the question remains: why did it take so long for international pressure to be brought to bear? The positive contribution of international links needs to be seen in the context of other factors which served, particularly during the Cold War, to mitigate against change. It is suggested, for instance, that the international community would rather have seen a reformed MCP than a truly open democratic process; perhaps the view 'better a right-wing conservative than some unknown socialist' (interview with ex-diplomat to Malawi, quoted in Lwanda 1996: 92) was one widely held amongst western governments. And it was not just Western governments, the business community and others, even the churches, may also have contributed. For instance the Pope's visit at the end of the 1980s was successfully treated by the MCP as a state visit and therefore one which was probably seen as reinforcing the status quo.

That other African countries were also experiencing their own transition processes at the time must have been influential. For instance, in Zambia democratic elections were held in 1991. Kenyans were also fighting for more democratic conditions. And in both instances the role of the Church in the democratic process had been of critical importance. Such examples are said to have helped establish the possibility of resisting the regime in the minds of Malawians and in encouraging the churches to act (interviews with staff members of northern NGOs). In neighbouring Mozambique, Tanzania and Zambia exiled Malawian opposition groups, such as The Socialist League of Malawi (LESOMA) and the Malawi Freedom Movement (MAFREMO), had been protesting against the regime for some time. Initially they had little effect; the lack of co-ordination and unity between the groups as well as the brutality of the Malawian intelligence service limited their activities. Protests by Mkwapatira Mhango, an exiled journalist living in Lusaka, led to his and his two wives and seven children's death when his home was fire-bombed (Cullen, 1994: 30).

In the months before the 1992 bishops letter, growing discontent with the government led to the emergence of small but active underground opposition movements. They wrote critical letters which were sent to allies outside the country who then organised for them to be faxed back to key people within Malawi. The importance of fax machines in this process is noteworthy since they allowed information to be sent in a way which was not traceable from Malawi to the outside world and visa versa (Chirwa 1995). A letter about Mr Tembo who, in an interview with the BBC World Service, had been very critical of the exiles and defensive of the supposed freedoms

which Malawi's one-party State afforded its citizens, was faxed in February 1992 to all embassies, permanent secretaries, the army commander and inspector of police. The letter refuted Tembo's position by stating that 'No Malawian in this country is free to express his or her view or opinion. Merely to express a view is to go to prison. Yet you choose to lie shamefully to the world ... we want multi-party democracy and we are determined to get it. We are going to oppose you to the bitter end'. Martyrs' Day saw another faxed letter - although unsigned - written about all those who had suffered *since* independence, rather than those who had been influential in the independence movement.

The late 1980s saw a new generation of Malawian youth, with independent minds, begin to voice their concerns. In October 1989 Chancellor College students published a critical article stating their grievances with the way in which the selection procedure favoured those from the south and central regions rather than from the north. Banda, himself chancellor of the college, took it as a personal criticism; four students were expelled and the editor and two reporters were suspended for the remainder of the academic year. The other students, to the surprise of many, came out in support of their dismissed colleagues and abstained from classes for two days (Cullen 1994: 31). Although soon forced back into their classes the point had been made. As one of the lecturers at Chancellor college put it: 'there was an effect: for the first time, ordinary people realised that protest was possible' (Lwanda 1996: 86).

Other incidents of protest were occurring with increasing frequency. For instance, in 1991 the national dress code was questioned in an article published by *Moni Magazine*, written by Matembo Nzunda, which led to both the editor of the magazine and Nzunda being briefly detained. An apology was included in the next edition of the magazine, yet once more the issue had been voiced.

The Law Society of Malawi, particularly the younger practitioners, began to defend the legal rights of individual clients and by the 1990s had become a force with which to be reckoned. The links the lawyers had in the UK and other European countries and the support it received from the American Embassy in Lilongwe was certainly influential (Newell 1995: 245).

Another significant factor in allowing the momentum for change to build was Banda's ill health. In 1990 Banda, then in his nineties, reportedly suffered a stroke. Yet his successor has still not been appointed. Tembo, the Minister for State and perhaps the most obvious candidate, was unpopular with many, particularly the commander in chief of the army and thus the ailing Banda remained in control. However, his ailing health must have contributed to the feeling that the MCP was losing its grip over the country and gave people increasing confidence to mount opposition to the State.

Taken together, all these elements, both within and outside Malawi, represented a ground swell of growing momentum, yet

there was an unmistakably religious component to the 'Malawi Revolution'. It was the pastoral letter of the Catholic bishops which actually ignited the fires of protest. Both in the composition of the letter and in standing firm under

intense pressure to withdraw the statement, it is clear that the Bishops drew deeply on the resources of their Christian faith. (Nzundu and Ross 1995: 10)

Perhaps one of the more immediate events that led to the issuing of the pastoral letter by the bishops was a conference held during 1991 in Zomba at St. Peter's Major Seminary. The conference was attended by Catholics both working and teaching in Malawi as well as by members of other denominations from Malawi and other countries throughout the region. The theme was 'Pastors for the Third Millennium'. The conference emphasised how important it is for church leaders to have a clear political understanding in order that they might be able to help their congregations in their search for more just political systems. The Rt. Rev. Dr Kalilombe argued that the church leadership needed to be 'prophetic, disinterested and yet courageous enough to be able to speak up for justice, freedom and dignity, even if it has to share in the suffering of the people because of their ministry' (Kalilombe, quoted in Newell 1995: 247). Surely such strong and clearly voiced sentiments can hardly have failed to influence the bishops' decision to act.

Soon after the letter was read in the Catholic churches throughout Malawi it was photocopied and widely distributed. Such was its force and the threat that it posed, that it provoked a very strong reaction from the government: bishops were detained and interrogated and then placed under house arrest. A notice was served on the document calling it 'seditious' and informing people that they would be detained if found in possession of a copy. The official press carried scathing attacks on the bishops meanwhile praising other churches in an attempt to ensure they did not rally behind the bishops but remained steadfast in their support of the government. The press where the letter had been printed was burnt down and finally death threats were made against the bishops. Unfortunately for the government the death threat was leaked not only to a foreign embassy in Malawi but also by a letter which was smuggled out of the country to England where it found its way, within hours, onto the BBC's 'Focus on Africa' programme, and thus ensuring international comment and action (Cullen 1994; Lwanda 1996).

The need for reform had been clearly voiced, yet how was the process carried through? What were the factors that allowed reform to have such a mobilising force?

### **The Steps to Democracy: March 1992-May 1994**

Various elements came together to see the democratic process through. Here the role of the churches is outlined in the context of the contributions made by others, for instance the international community, the lawyers and the press.

Shortly after the issuing of the pastoral letter, in May 1992, the international donor community at its meetings in Paris decided to suspend aid to Malawi until they could show an improvement in their human rights record and demonstrate a more

democratic system of governance than that which was currently in place. With the economy in near collapse this undoubtedly put pressure on the government.

In June 1992 other churches began rallying behind the bishops, despite the government's intensified attempts to discredit them. It was the Presbyterians who made the first move, particularly influenced by the Blantyre and Livingstonia Synods. They took up the struggle for democracy by calling for the appointment of a broadly based commission which would have responsibility for the reform of Malawi's political system. By October the 'Public Affairs Committee' had been formed. Although organised by the churches it also included representatives of the Muslim community, emerging opposition politicians, the Malawi Law Society as well as the business community. When Banda agreed that government ministers should hold talks with the PAC it was the first time that a civic organisation of any kind had been acknowledged as having a role to play in the country's national political life (Lwanda 1996; Ross 1995).

It is important to note that those church leaders who spearheaded the confrontation with government did so with great courage and with significant personal cost (Ross 1995a). They were exposed to considerable danger through their high-profile involvement in the reform movement. The expatriate Msgr John Roche, whom the government attempted to blame and hold responsible for the drafting of the pastoral letter, was expelled along with other expatriates deemed to have been involved in the publishing of the letter. This left others open to the full force of the government's anger. The Rev. Aaron Longwe, a Presbyterian minister who forthrightly took up social and political issues, was repeatedly detained and other church leaders were harassed and received death threats.

In October 1992 the government finally conceded to holding a referendum on the question of whether to retain the one-party system or to adopt a multi-party system of government instead. The coming together of the churches and their role in providing voter education was important in the run-up to the announcement of the referendum. The Catholics, having withdrawn somewhat from the public arena after the March pastoral letter, decided to speak again by issuing a second letter 'Choosing our Future' which was a contribution to voter education and marked the Catholic Churches' willingness to involve itself fully in the challenge of building democracy rather than solely as an agitator for change. After the announcement, 'pressure groups' that had been campaigning for multi-party democracy transformed themselves into organised opposition groups - the two main groups being the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD) and the United Democratic Front (UDF) - which began speaking and organising freely; a 'privilege' so long denied them under MCP control (Nzunda and Ross 1995).

A strong independent press also emerged which was openly critical of the MCP and one-party rule. During 1992 two new and influential newspapers were launched - *The Malawi Democrat* (which was printed and available in Zambia) and the *UDF News* in Malawi. In addition to the newspapers a number of plays critical of the government and on the theme of multi-party democracy were staged, mainly in schools. Together they posed a significant threat to the government and were banned by the Ministers of Justice and Education. However, appeals were made to the High Court which were successful in ensuring the lifting of the ban.

Thus, the law helped in the process of change by creating an environment in which arbitrary Ministerial decisions which stood in the way of change were struck down. (Nzunda and Ross 1995: 11)

It came as no surprise that the referendum held on 14th June 1993 saw a two-thirds majority voting for a multi-party system. Jubilant crowds in urban centres acknowledged the very significant role of the churches in their newfound freedom by gathering outside the Bishops' House (Ross 1995: 31). The government did not, however, resign immediately. A cross-party National Consultative Council and National Executive Committee was nevertheless appointed to oversee the transition to multi-party government and it set about reforming various institutions. They abolished the life presidency, detention without trial, the Forfeiture Act and the Decency in Dress Act, all of which were tools of oppression by the one-party State (Nuzunda and Ross 1995).

A General Election was called for on 17th May 1994 yet people were still fearful that the government would try to claw back its power. This culminated in 'Operation Bwezani' when the army disarmed the Malawi Young Pioneers (MYP), an armed youth organisation which the Malawi Congress Party had used as an instrument of political control. Although political parties in the new multi-party system were, of course, disallowed their own armed wings, Banda, having initially agreed to their disarmament, refused to relinquish his control over them. By taking matters into their own hands and mounting the successful 'Operation Bwezani' to disarm the MYPs the army therefore dismantled their threat to the democratic process. Concerns were voiced that the event would set a precedent, yet neither the official arm of the Church or the law issued any official reaction to this initiative, although Fr James Tengatenga later gave a theological response (Tengatenga 1995).

The elections held on 21st May 1994 were free and fair, with a few exceptions, and were won by Baliki Muluzi. This heralded the end of the transition to multi-party democracy, although additional amendments to the constitution and to the furtherance of democracy continued for some time. Muluzi recognised the contribution of the churches in his inaugural address by publicly thanking them for 'showing the way'. He also urged them to continue offering guidance to the political process.

So what were the factors that allowed the churches to be so effective as agents of social and political change? And what were the factors within the Church that may have worked to counter a full expression of its increasingly significant advocacy role?

## **Strengths**

**Solidarity with the poor:** The last twenty-five years have seen a consolidation of the Church's identification with the poor and the oppressed which has allowed it to be one of the most powerful movements for social change. Although different churches have taken various approaches, from liberation theology and its revolutionary ideologies to those approaches which are much more paternalistic, a general consensus has emerged of the need for the churches to be in solidarity with the

poorest. 'This radical orientation to the dispossessed and disadvantaged sections of society cannot fail to operate as a powerful political dynamic in the drive for social justice' (Ross 1995a: 33).

In Malawi the pastoral letter of March 1992 was written with this perspective in mind. It began with the words:

In our society we are aware of a growing gap between the rich and the poor with regard to expectations, living standards and development. Many people still live in circumstances which are hardly compatible with their dignity as sons and daughters of God. Their life is a struggle for survival. At the same time a minority enjoys the fruits of development and can afford to live in luxury and wealth. We appeal for a more just distribution of the nation's wealth.

The Presbyterians followed with a call to set up a public committee 'to look into the distribution of income and wealth required by the demands of social justice' (World Alliance of Reformed Churches 1992: 2).

By identifying with the needs of the poorest, the churches were given a rationale for challenging the political status quo, but it was also the structure of the Catholic Church - embedded as it is in communities throughout Malawi - that allowed it to hear the voices of the poor and to give a true reflection of peoples' experiences. As one bishop is quoted as saying 'I did not write the letter; it was written a long time ago on the hearts of our people' (Ross 1995b: 100). The fact that other sections of the community rallied behind the Bishops illustrates the chord it had struck.

**The theology of the Church:** In addition to their identification with the poorest through their social teachings and action, the churches have a tradition of worship and a set of scriptures on which to draw. Priests throughout Malawi preached many sermons which sought to draw lessons about social and political affairs from their biblical teachings. The prevailing political system had worked for thirty years to inculcate a belief in and support for the validity of the one-party system. Thus for people to have faith that political change was achievable they needed some way of breaking with the status quo, some hook on which to call the government to account.

The pastoral letter helped break the spell, and thereafter 'the MCP government could no longer be "a law unto itself" for the church was measuring the policies and action of the government against the norms and criterion of the biblical message of the kingdom of God'. (Ross 1995a: 37)

**The International Character of the Church:** Undoubtedly the international nature of the churches, through links between the Malawian churches and those in other parts of Africa as well as in Europe, greatly strengthened the resolve of the Catholic bishops and the other churches that then joined them in their condemnation of the State. The issuing of pastoral letters by the Episcopal Conferences in Kenya and Zimbabwe are said to have had a positive influence on the Malawian bishops and although the Pope did not say anything publicly during his visit in the late 1980s, he is said to have impressed on the bishops their role in calling for an end to abuses of human rights

where they might exist. The visit of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in June 1992 offered practical support and solidarity to the leaders of the Presbyterian Church. And a visit was made by the PAC to the UK to meet with the Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland (a meeting to which the Malawian government had invited itself but from which it was turned away).

Thus the expectations of the international arm of the Church is likely to have encouraged the Malawian churches to stand firm in their actions, whilst their links to an international network must surely have made it more difficult for the Malawian government to take overtly aggressive actions against their church leaders.

**Unity and diversity within the Church:** The diversity of the churches in Malawi served as a strength rather than a weakness during the 1992-1994 period. The different styles of the Roman Catholic Church and the Presbyterian Church complemented each other. According to Troeltsch Catholicism has a tendency to express itself in discrete interventions, the pastoral letter being an excellent example of this (quoted in Ross 1995a: 39). As one northern NGO staff person interviewed during this research described it: 'The Catholic Church is like a tortoise, it sticks its head out, says what it is wants to say, and then pulls it back into its shell until the next time'. The Presbyterian tradition on the other hand is marked by 'a systematic endeavour to mould the life of society as a whole ... it lays down the principle that the church ought to be interested in all sides of life' (Troeltsch 1931; quoted in Ross 1995a: 39-40). The response of the Presbyterians in Malawi reflected this by taking responsibility for the creation of the Public Affairs Committee. Thus whilst it '... was the prophetic voice of the Catholic Bishops which awakened the nation to the need for radical social change. It was the 'hands-on' engagement of the Presbyterians which translated the awakening into a coherent and well-organised movement for political reform' (Ross 1995a: 40).

Yet the unity of the churches was also of critical importance. Banda explicitly tried to rule by dividing the churches and claimed that the pastoral letter had been written by the Catholics simply because they hated the Presbyterians. That the Presbyterians were able to resist the call of the government to rally behind them instead of the Catholic bishops was of central importance. Indeed the support by the churches of the opposition lent them credibility and legitimacy, another factor of significant importance in the transition.

## **Weaknesses**

**Division in the Church / religious legitimisation of the State:** The fact that some churches stood safely behind the government whilst others stuck their necks out caused serious division such that the: '... battle was waged not only *between* the churches and the repressive political system but *within* and *among* the churches themselves' (Ross 1995a: 42).

As discussed earlier in this report the legitimisation provided by the Church to the State in Malawi was significant. Although many of the mainline churches, and most significantly the CCAP, withdrew their support for the regime during 1992, others still

served to prop up the government. For a time the Nkhoma Synod became the church to officiate at government meetings and continued, albeit alone, to show solidarity with the MCP. It was duly rewarded with the government's patronage, but when even its support 'became lukewarm', the MCP still resorted to the use of religious imagery, such as a series of cartoons on the theme of 'MCP Points to God!; Multi-Party - Horns of the Devil!' ('Guardian Today', 1/7, 19th-25th May 1993; quoted in Ross 1995a: 38). Had they been able to bring more of the churches behind them then this would have posed a serious threat to the process of transition.

**Church organisations:** Many churches mirror in their hierarchy and in their relationships to the powerful some of the traits exhibited by undemocratic governments. By posing questions for the State about the way in which it operates should place a demand on the Church also to examine their structures and the way in which it relates to the State. Churches did openly discuss its disquiet about the support they had given the State since independence. However, whilst they recognised that through such support their ability to give critical guidance had been reduced, they were at the same time somewhat uncritically backing the opposition.

## Conclusion

This case study illustrates clearly the very significant and central role that the Church, and the Catholic Church in particular, has played in Malawi's transition to multi-party democracy. Their role was one of initiating and consolidating the actions of other civic groups by building on wider social changes occurring in Malawi and by speaking from a position of moral and spiritual authority. Indeed the Church has continued to struggle for the alleviation of poverty and for people's social and political rights.

That the Catholic bishops have written two more pastoral letters since Bakili Muluzi was elected in 1994 is perhaps testimony to the continued political and economic injustices afflicting Malawi. In the pastoral letter of May 1998 the bishops noted that Malawi is becoming more '... stained by corruption which takes many new forms today. It is robbing our nation of scarce resources and it is the poor and less powerful ... who get punished by this deplorable crime'. The bishops also condemned the low wages of most Malawians, the uncontrolled price rise of consumer goods, insecurity in the country, high fertilizer costs, mistreatment of tobacco farm workers by farm owners and the misuse of the media by both journalists and the government (Malawi News On-line, 19th May 1998). That the bishops were threatened with arrest by Muluzi himself after issuing their pastoral letter in 1996, which made similar accusations, is further evidence that the democratic process in Malawi still has a long way to go. The bishops and other commentators, for instance Van Donge, seem to point towards: 'a persistence of order in the democratisation of Malawi' with a spirit of consensus carrying the process forward (Van Donge 1995).

The transition in Malawi was brought about by many factors, but underlying them was the all-pervasive poverty which afflicted the country during the MCP's rule. Lwanda argues that

... poverty has so far been the predominant factor in Malawi's politics ... But poverty itself, although resulting from historical, environmental, economic, antecedent and current political factors, is ultimately sustained and exacerbated by the politics governing the economy. (Lwanda 1996: 7)

He goes on to note that

despite the varying degrees of political involvement, even after Banda, all aspects of civil society, including the churches are still heavily influenced by the State ... Malawi's new politics and hence democracy is marked by both fragility and its continued domination by the business sector of society. (Lwanda 1996: 7)

The churches were successful in bringing about a change in the overall political structure of Malawi. They had a single aim: to move the country from a one-party state to a multi-party democracy. However, the multifaceted nature of the causes of poverty present perhaps a much greater challenge.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Zambia:**

#### **The Role of the Churches in Advocating for Economic Rights**

In Zambia the relationship between the Church and the State is characterised by the government's close identification with Christianity. Since 1964 the heads of state in Zambia have had very strong personal associations with the Church. Kenneth Kaunda, leader of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) and president between 1964 and 1991, often used his Christian roots to bestow legitimacy on his

leadership. The current president, Chiluba, who won the free and fair multi-party elections in 1991 with a sweeping majority has, however, taken this association on to a new level: 'The reality is that in today's Zambia there is really no distinction between the secular and the religious' (Ihonvbere 1996). Although this is perhaps overstating the situation, there is a definite blurring of boundaries between Church and State. This presents the Church with both opportunities and constraints and in many ways poses very significant challenges to the churches' advocacy role.

This chapter examines the role of the churches in working for an end to Zambia's rapid economic decline and the negative impacts of the Structural Adjustment Programme. It begins with a brief outline of the different types of church found in Zambia and then examines the changing nature of churches' relationships with the State and with other civic organisations. In each of these areas the influence of the nature of the churches' relationships with the State on the ability of the Church to work for an improvement in Zambia's economic situation is examined and its strengths and weaknesses outlined.

## **The Churches in Zambia**

The vast majority of Zambians are Christian; it is thought that 75% are Christian, 24% subscribing to traditional belief systems, leaving a very small (roughly 1%) Muslim minority. Of the mainline churches the Catholics are probably the most numerous and certainly the most influential in terms of advocacy work. As in Malawi, there are a number of Catholic orders, primarily the White Fathers, Jesuits and Franciscans, each having a particular influence in the areas where they are strongest. Although in the past the country was divided by different religious congregations this is not the case today and Zambian diocesan priests and bishops are a major force throughout the country. Indeed there are a variety of Protestant churches although the Anglicans are relatively few in number. The United Church of Zambia (UCZ), an unusual ecumenical venture which grew out of an alliance of Protestants and Methodists working on the Copper Belt, still has a high profile in Zambia. And there is also the Reformed Church of Zambia (RCZ) which emerged from the Dutch Reformed Mission from South Africa.

All the mainline churches have a different mode of engaging in advocacy, some of which relates to their history, and which is discussed in more detail below. Although Pentecostal churches are generally described in the literature as lacking a public or prophetic role, in Zambia their links, particularly with respect to the current government, demands that their role is considered where relevant. The African Independent Churches do not by and large have a role in advocating and engaging in rights-based work. But as they are an important part of the history of the Church in Zambia, some of the larger and more influential are mentioned here (Verstraelen-Gulhuis, 1982; Gifford, 1998).

One of the most renowned Independent Churches in Africa is Alice Lenshina's Lumpa Church which grew rapidly in the 1950s, receiving numerous defectors from Zambia's mission churches. However, it was destroyed by the government, apparently worried that it might act as a place for the mobilisation of organised opposition forces. More

than a thousand people were killed in the clashes and around 30,000 fled into neighbouring Zaire. Although such confrontation with the churches is no longer a dynamic of Church-State interaction it is nevertheless a part of its history. Whilst nothing is left of Alice Lenshina's church, another Independent Church - led by Emilio Mulolani - which emerged during the same time and in the same place as the Lumpa Church, also in response to the widespread social pressures of the time, does still exist although it is now fairly insignificant.

The New Apostolic Church, which grew very rapidly during the 1980s to become the third largest church in Zambia today '... remains largely unknown. Partly this is its own wish, for it joins with no others, and co-operates in nothing ... their direct public role is quite limited; they will have nothing to do with politics' (Gifford 1998: 184-6). The popularity of the Church can perhaps be explained both by the professional nature of its operations and by the fact that it has very substantial international funding not only for the church structure itself but also for the relief of its members.

The Jehovah's Witnesses are also worth mentioning since Zambia has a higher proportion of Jehovah's Witnesses than any other country in the world. Their beliefs do not allow them a direct role in politics or other areas of public service such as the army or the police force and they are not even permitted to vote. Gifford argues however that the stress they put on education and public-speaking abilities and the value they place on equality between men and women probably does have an indirect role in influencing social change in Zambia (Gifford 1998).

## **Ecumenism in Zambia**

Zambia has three main ecumenical bodies: the Catholic Zambia Episcopal Conference (ZEC); the Christian Council of Zambia (CCZ) which comprises 13 different Protestant churches; and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zambia (EFZ). The EFZ was started by the Baptists for Evangelical churches but its twenty-four member churches are now primarily Pentecostal. Whilst they all work in rather different ways and have varying capacities, there is a tradition among all three groups, Catholics, Protestants and Pentecostals, of working together in a way that is non-existent in other parts of Africa. They first co-operated in 1979 when the government was threatening to impose 'Scientific Socialism' by producing a joint statement: *Marxism, Humanism and Christianity* (Lungu 1986: 398).

The ZEC perhaps has the greatest capacity since they are unified in a way that the CCZ and the EFZ are not, given their broad and relatively diverse membership. The Catholics are therefore often found leading the way, both in terms of their involvement in service provision and in their prophetic role.

The mainline churches have traditionally been involved in service delivery and today are considerably influential, particularly in the educational sector where a large number of secondary schools are run by the churches. The government has recently allowed an increase in the level of control and responsibility the churches have over the schools, by allowing the principle and the deputy of the school to be members of the church which runs it (Gifford 1998: 189).

The churches' combined exposure to people's living conditions through their pastoral work at the parish level in both rural and urban areas as well as through their service delivery work, in schools and hospitals, gives them an understanding of people's living conditions and the problems they face. This enables them to speak with authority and when combined with the legitimacy that their moral position in the community lends them, they undoubtedly have the potential for influence. The next section examines the role the churches and other civic organisations have been able to play in advocating for political reform.

## **Civil Society Organisations: Advocating for Change**

The transition from colonial rule to independent government was fairly peaceful and had little to do with the churches. The United National Independence Party (UNIP), which had roots in the labour movement, was at the forefront of the independence struggle and when Zambia gained independence in 1964 Kenneth Kaunda, leader of the UNIP was appointed president. At that time Zambia was one of the richest countries in the region and during the first ten years of Kaunda's rule, with copper prices high on the international market, there was economic growth and relative prosperity. GDP grew by 2.5% a year and gross national income increased by nearly 5%. With economic growth and foreign exchange earnings from copper the public sector rapidly expanded, general government consumption rising from 16 to 30% of GNP between 1970 and 1975 (Copestake 1993: 162). But the UNIP government did not manage to diversify the economy and when the price of copper plummeted in 1975, accompanied as it was by the sharp increases in the price of oil affecting the price of important imports, the country found itself in deep water. However, Kaunda had already secured his position by declaring Zambia a one-party state in 1973. Although a constitution was adopted that banned official opposition parties, it did guarantee citizens the right to criticise the government. This had little influence, of course, and the government generally proved to be intolerant of criticism, although not as repressive in its response as, for instance, in neighbouring Malawi.

As economic conditions deteriorated through the 1970s and 1980s people across the country began to criticise and challenge the State. In Kenya and Malawi it was the churches that lead the way in speaking out about the socio-economic and political injustices that afflicted their countries, and although in Zambia they also played an important role, it was the labour movement, led by the Zambia Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), which championed the democratic cause. By the end of the 1980s

the deepening economic crisis and popular pressures and responses forced the increasingly desperate State to become more intolerant. It readily invoked its draconian labour laws, emergency powers, and other manipulative methods to contain popular protests and opposition. These strategies were particularly directed at the ZCTU which was increasingly becoming 'the conscience of the nation' and the bastion of opposition to one party rule and political oppression. (Ihonvbere 1996: 62)

The ZCTU commented on most major government policies and programmes but played a particularly important role in providing a critique of wage policies and commodity pricing (Bratton 1994). The links between the unions and the government were established early on. It was as a result of the labour movement's alliance with the early political parties that the independence struggle was won, and years later it was Chiluba, formerly the leader of the trade unions, who won the 1991 election which took Zambia from a one-party state towards a multi-party democracy. In spite or perhaps because of these close links once in power Kaunda took steps to limit the power of the unions, just as Chiluba has done. Yet despite the intimidation suffered by those leading the labour movement their comments are generally listened to (Lungu 1986; Bratton 1994).

The press has also played an important role despite the fact that Kaunda nationalised the two main daily newspapers, the *Times of Zambia* and the *Daily Mail*, thus limiting their potential to speak out (Kasoma 1984). In spite of the frequent threats and restrictions placed upon them, a number of newspapers developed satirical columns during the 1980s and wrote critical editorials which are said to have made a significant contribution to changes in some government policies and actions (Lungu 1986). The papers most able to provide critical comment, however, are those owned and run by church institutions. These are the *National Mirror*, run by the company 'Multimedia' jointly owned by the CCZ and the ECZ, and the Catholic monthly paper *Icengelo*. *Icengelo* is a Bemba language magazine and as such has a very wide readership. Both *Icengelo* and the *National Mirror* have been influential in reporting on issues raised, for instance, by former detainees, students, and international donors, and they have become sharp critics of the general economic malaise afflicting the country. In the run-up to the elections in 1991 both papers gave Chiluba and the MMD extensive coverage, a factor which worsened the relationship Kaunda had come to have with the churches. The advocacy role of the Church, other than through its press, is outlined below in the context of its relationship to the State.

### **Church-State Relations**

It is important to examine the nature of the relationship between the Church and the State in order that we may better understand their role in advocating for improved economic conditions. During the period of colonial rule, as in many parts of Africa, the relationship between the government and the Church, was one of supporting the government, for reasons of their common European backgrounds and the churches' involvement in service provision.

For Kaunda the Church was of central importance. Just as Banda had done in Malawi, Kaunda often referred to his Christian roots (his father had been a missionary and was ordained as a Presbyterian pastor) in order to confer legitimacy on his leadership. But Kaunda, unlike Banda, was seen in most quarters as a benevolent and peaceable man: 'The qualities of humanness, liberality and considerate disposition are often attested to in Kaunda's leadership style' (Lungu 1986). Certainly this was a widely held view internationally. As his British biographer noted:

The unique importance of Kaunda to Africa stems from his profound personal belief in the innate and equal worth of the human being. Kaunda is deeply religious, with an ecumenical approach. This reinforces his beliefs. It is from

this conviction that arises his passionate devotion to social justice ... (Hatch, quoted in Lungu 1986)

The historical legacy of Kaunda as leader of UNIP does not, however, paint him in such a favourable light. When he was replaced by Chiluba in 1991 the country had huge foreign debts and an unwieldy bureaucracy. As Ihonvbere notes:

Mismanagement, corruption, the suffocation of popular groups and opposition elements, excessive dependence on copper exports for foreign exchange earnings, and the proliferation of inefficient and wasteful corporations simply reproduced Zambia's neo-colonial inheritances and under-development. (1996: 58)

And by the end of his term in office his relationship with the churches had seriously deteriorated. In the 1991 elections the Church attacked his: '... political ideology of humanism ... as a philosophy which puts man at the centre of society, instead of God. This never works. Humanism is a disaster' (statement by the head of the EFZ, quoted in Gifford 1998: 191). Kaunda had also become increasingly interested in Indian spirituality. As a result of his links with Dr Ranganathan, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, he allowed the establishment of a temple at State House. This was deeply disturbing to many Zambians who interpreted the associations as the work of the devil. Seeing his support waning Kaunda did all he could to mobilise the support of the churches once again. At vast expense he held a prayer meeting at the Intercontinental Hotel in Lusaka to which he invited presidents and prime ministers from numerous African nations, many of who made public reference during the meeting to Kaunda's Christian faith. Such references in the African context are seen only as good and as conferring legitimacy on one's position. A number of Zambian churches around the same time also openly voiced their support for him, although this does need to be considered in the context of the donations he made to at least some of those churches (Gifford 1998: 195).

In the pre-election period the churches joined forces with those advocating for change working within the MMD alongside other forces such as the trade unions and student and professional bodies. The leader of the MMD was Chiluba, a devout Christian and a member of the UCZ, who became a 'born again' reportedly after 'experiencing a conversion while briefly detained by Kaunda for his trade union activities in 1981' (Gifford 1998: 193). His Christian credentials were promoted and the party began to use Christian imagery in its literature, drawing heavily on biblical passages during public speeches.

As already noted the links between Church and State in Zambia today are not just close, but have become so significantly blurred that it seems Chiluba has co-opted Christianity. Although Ihonvbere refers to this as a 'merger of Church and State', Henriot, for instance, feels that this overstates the situation, referring rather to the politicising of religion by Chiluba and his colleagues (Henriot, personal communication, September 1998). When Chiluba took office a number of individuals from within the Church, particularly those who had been openly supportive of Chiluba in the election, moved quite freely from the Church into powerful positions in government. For instance, during the elections Rev. Danny Pule claimed (here clearly

referring to Kaunda) that ‘some presidential and parliamentary candidates were relying on witchcraft and demonic powers to win the election, which invited spiritual darkness into the land’ (Gifford 1998: 192). Pule went on to be appointed Assistant Minister of Finance in the new government. Another notable appointment was that of Rev. Stan Kristafor as Assistant Minister of Information, who soon banned Muslim programmes on the radio; a ban which the vice-president did later lift since it went counter to the constitution’s ruling on the freedom of worship (Gifford 1998: 201). Such examples clearly illustrate the way in which some of the churches were being used as political vehicles rather than as independent commentators or mediators.

After the election Zambia was declared a ‘Christian Nation’. Whilst welcomed by the EFZ other churches were more cautious in their response. Just as Kaunda had used Christianity for the legitimacy that it bestowed, Chiluba drew heavily on Christianity for political advantage:

He quoted 2 chronicles 7:14: ‘If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and forgive their sins and will heal their land. (Gifford 1998: 179)

Chiluba has politicised Christianity to such an extent that even when he was criticised he responded in biblical overtones: ‘Judge not, and you shall not be judged’ (Ihonvbere 1996: 199). He also took to inviting televangelists, mostly American, and hosting receptions for them, paid for out of State funds. The press responded very critically.

It is unacceptable for a President of this country to use taxpayers’ money to fulfil his personal religious dreams. [...] Chiluba’s commitment to born-again fanaticism is personal ... (and) ... dangerous to the good democratic governance of this country. [...] Chiluba should concentrate on addressing the political and economic ills of this country and tackling the corruption of his government. (A *Post* editorial quoted in Gifford 1998: 203)

Indeed the economic crisis facing the country needed addressing. Despite the government’s explicit support for the Church the mainline churches became disillusioned by the blatant contradictions between his rhetoric on the one hand and the way his was living and governing the country on the other. The churches’ involvement in advocating specifically for improvements in the economy are outlined below.

## **Economic Collapse: The Role of the Churches**

It became clear soon after the MMD government took office that they were to prove themselves little different from Kaunda’s UNIP government. Corruption was rife and economic decline continued unabated. Whilst the elite lined their pockets, the poor were getting poorer. As services collapsed, outbreaks of cholera and dysentery increased. Unemployment rose as international companies scaled down their

operations or moved out altogether. And journalists critical of the government were imprisoned as political freedoms were restricted.

Of the mainline churches it is the Catholic Church that has the greatest capacity for engaging in advocacy work. In addition to its role as a service provider, the 1990s have seen the Catholic Church become increasingly involved in advocacy work. The bishops have issued a number of pastoral letters, often on the subject of economic decline and corruption; July 1990, one of the first, was entitled: 'Economics, Politics and Justice'. Other Catholic bodies such as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) also make statements. As the CCJP at the national, regional and local levels became increasingly outspoken on economic issues its comments concerned some of the laity who organised a group which denounced these statements for 'preaching violence and linking up with opposition parties' (Gifford 1998: 211). However the bishops stood firm and continue to give the CCJP their backing.

Two of the most recent statements by the CCJP have provided comment on the government's budget; 'Social Dimensions of the 1997 Budget of the Government of the Republic of Zambia: A Contribution to the Debate' and 'What are our Priorities? Statements of the CCJP on the 1998 Budget of the Government of the Republic of Zambia'. The former caused a particularly strong and defensive reaction from the finance minister Ronald Penza who challenged the CCJP to 'pull out of religious affairs and join politics instead of hiding behind God's shield ... If they want to become politicians they should do so, then we can take on each other at the political level' (Penza, quoted in *The Post*, 24th Feb. 1997). Penza went on to accuse the bishops of creating 'dissidency in the country by trying to incite people by adopting populist positions on important national issues' (*National Mirror*, 2nd-8th March 1997). The ECZ responded simply by stating that Mr Penza's outburst was 'unfortunate' since in a democracy politicians should accept criticism, and that the Catholic Church had no intention of being drawn into politics since it was happy with its position as it was. *The Mirror* was much less reserved in its response.

Just how dare Mr Penza find it within himself to accuse the Zambia Episcopal Conference of nurturing an insurrectionary political agenda of creating dissidents? ... Mr Penza should know that it is wrong - morally, spiritually, intellectually, economically - to dismiss what the Catholic Bishops are saying as an exercise in populist insurrection ... Read the scriptures, O poor Penza, and tremble at the words of the Holy One of Israel, God dislikes those who contend against servants of the poor.' (*National Mirror*, n.d.)

In addition to the statements it issues on specific occasions the CCJP has a special programme called the Structural Adjustment Monitoring Programme. This is a project to monitor the social impacts of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), and is funded by Cafod. The project seeks to track over time indicators of the quality of life of the poor. In doing so it hopes to establish trends which can then be related to economic policies. Through this process it also aims to raise awareness and stimulate debate which it hopes will lead to considered responses to the government's economic policies; responses which are based on evidence. The data is collected by volunteers who receive training in data collection and report writing and is co-ordinated through the network of justice and peace departments located in Catholic dioceses. The

project, which began in 1995, has a newsletter - 'The SAP Monitor' which publishes the findings of the surveys as well as editorials on related social policy issues.

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection has also been engaged in initiatives which enable a monitoring of the impacts of the economy on people's lives. A particular contribution of the centre had been to start calculating on a monthly basis what a food basket for a family of six in Lusaka would cost. The basket includes mealie meal, charcoal, cooking oil, vegetables, meat, eggs, bread, sugar, salt, tea, soap, washing powder, and vaseline but not the cost of housing, water, electricity, transport, clothing, education, healthcare or recreation etc. To place the cost of living in context they have taken to putting a range of monthly salaries, received by civil service workers, alongside the cost of the food basket. They also list the cost of the basket in previous months to enable people to track for themselves the way in which changes in the economy are affecting their purchasing power, or lack of it. This is published in 'The SAP Monitor' (for an example see Appendix 2) as well as in many of the main newspapers and newsletters such as that published by the Chamber of Commerce and it is widely used by groups such as trade unions when bargaining for better conditions.

The high quality of the statements issued by the Catholics is, in comparison to other church bodies, unusual. The professionalism and expertise of the leadership and staff working at the CCJP and the ZEC are critical in this regard. The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection also makes an important contribution to the debates, for instance through 'The SAP Monitor'. The CCZ and the Evangelicals, although making important interventions, do not have the same kind of resources that the Catholics have, and are said to liaise with them on important issues and particularly before issuing key statements. The CCZ has spoken out on economic issues of poverty and structural adjustment on numerous occasions and Violet Sampa-Bredt, head of the CCZ, has been fiercely critical of the government. In July 1994, in a service to commemorate the International Day of the Family, 'Rev. Sampa-Bredt said the pressures of the current economic measures such as the SAPs undermine the basic values of the family in Zambia. [...] She said that although the church was being asked to pray for the family in Zambia, those prayers would be meaningless if they were not followed by action.' (CCZ News, 1994). And in December 1994 she highlighted the 'massive and deplorable starvation' created by government policies, and on the effects of the Structural Adjustment Programme she noted that even 'if we need the structural adjustment programme, we certainly do not need it in its present form, where corrupt activities have been reported to occupy centre stage ... The economy has been plundered by politicians and is on the brink of collapse'. She went on to note that in 1995 the CCZ would do all it could to encourage 'our membership and civil society in general to take a pro-active role in the governance of our country.' (Violet Sampra-Bredt, quoted in Gifford 1998: 212).

In addition to their separate activities and speeches the ecumenical bodies also work together. In May 1996, for instance, with the country in near collapse the three ecumenical church bodies came together to issue a joint statement which pleaded for a 'Year of Political Responsibility'. They outlined programmes which the church might engage in to try and bring about an increased political awareness. And by drawing on the Christian criteria so often employed by the government they called for political life

to be guided by ‘Gospel values of respect for human dignity, human rights, common good, and social justice, solidarity, integral development, special concern for the poor and non-violence in resolving conflict’ (Gifford 1998: 208).

Although the Evangelicals and Pentecostals are not being considered in detail by this study since their role in political affairs is generally insignificant, it is worth mentioning at least one Pentecostal conference at which economic issues were raised. The majority of Pentecostals do indeed tend to preach the ‘Faith Gospel’, i.e. that economic prosperity will follow ‘if you order your priorities correctly and put God first’. They preach that ‘you only receive by giving’. However, some Pentecostals have shown that they too can be harsh critics of government policies; although their analysis has less weight than the more academically rigorous approach of, for instance, the Catholics. At a convention in August 1994, two preachers from Pentecostal churches stood out in particular. Musa Sona from Soweto and Menas Otabil from Ghana. Sona, when talking about South Africa noted that ‘if you were white you always had more than a black man. [...] Most white people were making it, and not because of their faith, but because of being advantaged economically’ (Gifford 1998: 236). Perhaps most outspoken of all however, is Otabil. On economic issues he said:

The poverty of Africa is not spiritual.[...] Poverty is physical. Poverty is a social condition. [...] When I was growing up, I was told there was only one solution: ‘Give and it will be given to you.’ I did this and I got poorer. [...] If you are a poor nation, you will be poor. So your personal individual prosperity is tied up with the prosperity of the nation. [...] We have to think structurally, to think about the economy of the nation. You can’t preach in Africa and not be political. Christians can’t say ‘Let’s leave politics to politicians.’ [...] You can have a Christian President or whatever, but that may not change anything, because poverty is not spiritual. You can have a Christian President, Vice President, Minister of Finance, whatever, the dynamics of prosperity are not spiritual. [...] We have to change the structures that govern our nation. (Otabil, quoted in Gifford 1998: 240)

Here Otabil, by going against the grain of the Evangelical and Pentecostal tradition, which by and large maintains a distance from political affairs, is making a significant and important statement. But the solutions he poses are perhaps less valid in that they reflect little understanding of the economic realities that face most of the poorest in Africa. ‘The key’, he said, ‘lies in a work-conscious, ownership-conscious, skilled populace. Don’t think, “Who can give me a job?” Think, “When can I start a business?”’ (Otabil, quoted in Gifford 1998: 242). He implies that the way out is to start one’s own business without acknowledging or recognising that for most people that is not an option because of the lack of access to capital. Although this may signify the beginnings of change within the Pentecostal tradition, since neither of the speakers mentioned are Zambian and because the more traditional approach of the Pentecostals is still very much alive and well in Zambia, it is perhaps important not to overemphasise the significance of such speeches.

The churches in Zambia exhibit various strengths and weakness in relation to their advocacy work and these are outlined below:

## Strengths

**The churches' position in society:** The majority of the population in Zambia are Christian. This gives the Church a position of legitimacy and influence. It has effectively imbued a number of social institutions such as the family, marriage and of course religion, with certain Christian values thus effecting changes in the socio-cultural milieu. Since the colonial period the Church has also played an extensive role in the provision of education and other social services. When Zambia became independent in 1964 two-thirds of secondary schools, and an even higher proportion of primary schools, were run by the Catholic Church. Today the churches continue to play an important role in service provision and have also brought into the country much needed foreign aid for community development and other related programmes.

**Catholics:** The level of expertise and the professionalism of the Catholics, particularly those working in the CCJP and the ZEC, are of critical importance. They have an extremely competent leadership and are very influential in the Zambian context because of these qualities.

**Ecumenism:** When the mainline churches in Zambia are able to unite and speak out, through the ZEC, CCZ and the EFZ, they become a formidable force. That they are able to do so is a great strength and one not so common in the African context.

**Christian orientation of the leadership:** Zambia has only had two leaders, Kaunda and Chiluba, since independence and both have a strong Christian background which has undoubtedly been a factor in favour of the churches. Other high-ranking government officials have strong Christian roots, which they often refer to for purposes of political legitimacy. They, therefore, tend to try and avoid direct confrontation with the churches if at all possible for fear that it will jeopardise their moral and political standing. As Gifford notes, 'Christianity is seen in some parts of southern Africa - as something totally good, which enhances the standing of all associated with it' (1998: 195). Thus the Christian orientation of those in power can be drawn on and referred to by the churches when criticising their actions or policies.

**Style of criticism:** The churches have developed a style of criticism against the government which is based on employing: 'a language style that is simultaneously laudatory of government achievements and critical of a particular aspect of public policy' (Lungu 1986: 401). By attacking a particular department or policy, but not the president himself, indirect criticism is made of the leadership. Lungu also notes that 'Zambians, especially urban dwellers ... have not only grown familiar with the criticisms voiced by the church ... but have also been disposed to expect it' (1986: 394).

## Weaknesses

**Division within the churches:** Although there is a tradition of collaboration among some churches, particularly between the CCZ and the ZEC and at times between those institutions and the Pentecostals, this is not always the case. For instance in mid-1996 in inter-party talks both sides refused to have the churches as mediators since some felt that mainline churches were on the side of the opposition whilst the others felt that prominent Pentecostals were siding with Chiluba (Gifford 1998: 211). Such was the conflict that ensued between the churches themselves that the talks were finally mediated by the Law Society. Such a rebuttal of the churches, so much a part of Zambian society, is not insignificant.

**Ecumenism:** As is the case for many ecumenical structures, there are inherent difficulties in bringing together a wide range of churches some of who will have quite different perspectives. Not only is there the challenge of arriving at a common position in relation to particular issues, but there are the difficulties posed by their rather cumbersome organisational structures. Thus ecumenical ventures such as Multimedia and the Africa Literature Centre

...limp along, functioning at a fraction of their potential, precisely because they are ecumenical ... Multimedia is sponsored by so many different churches, each of which wants some of its members to work there, that it is overstaffed and inefficient. For that reason it has over 20 directors, far too many to function with any clear purpose. (Gifford, 1998: 189)

**Need for clarity on the role of the Church in politics:** As referred to previously the Zambian State has essentially co-opted the Church, or at least parts of it. Many Pentecostals, for instance, do not maintain the position, held by the Catholics and most Protestants, that the Church should remain separate from the State. They: 'do not have a theology of good government; for them all that is needed is to have Christian leaders (frequently themselves) either in positions of influence or as advisors to those who hold such positions'. As the David Livingstone Memorial Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa was to comment, Zambia 'can only be a Christian nation if religious leaders take up active positions in the running of the country's affairs'. Similarly another church leader stated that 'pagans should not be voted for in the 1996 general election ... The church must move in and run the affairs of the country' (Gifford 1998: 217). Indeed it seems that is just what some churches intend to do. On 15th September 1997, Zambia News On-line wrote that

After years of limiting its role in local politics to being mediator, the church in Zambia has now thrown itself into the political area as a participant. At least this is the impression and suspicion arising from an announcement made recently by Zambia's most outspoken evangelist, Pastor Nevers Mumba, that a National Christian Coalition (NCC) has been formed. Although Pastor Mumba insists that the coalition is not a political party, not many believe him. [...] [He notes] that the coalition's immediate task was to identify 'morally upright people' to contest forth-coming local government elections.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The NCC has in fact now become a political party, changing its name to the 'National Citizens Coalition' and has begun to speak out sharply on economic issues facing the country.

## Conclusion

The previous two case studies of Kenya and Malawi have focused on the role of the Church in bringing about a fundamental change in political structures. This case study, however, has focused primarily on the role of the Church in advocating for improvements in people's living conditions, set against the backdrop of the churches' role in advocating for Kaunda's one-party state to be replaced by a multi-party democracy. In many ways this poses a greater challenge to the churches since it requires them to develop a capacity to comment on the complexities of the way in which government prioritises and constructs its policies. As Peter Henriot notes:

In looking at the poverty situation in Zambia and thinking about some effective political action to alleviate or even eradicate poverty, we have to be honest and acknowledge that it is difficult to pin-point any one single factor as the over-riding cause. (*Times of Zambia*, 6th March 1996)

The first step for the churches in the countries we have discussed in this report, has been to advocate for a multi-party political system; a single factor that is clearly identifiable as being important. The next step, however, is for people to have faith in their new government's willingness to uphold democratic values and their ability to prove they are accountable to the majority. Given the recent government's performance it is hardly surprising that Zambians lack confidence in its ability. As 'at least one Zambian has been heard to comment [with regard to the general apathy to register for the election]: 'Don't give us more time to register, give us more reasons!'"(Henriot *Times of Zambia*, 6th March 1996). Whilst at least some of the churches have made an impressive start, they have an uphill struggle on their hands if they are to push the political powers that be into a position that gives people those reasons.

# Chapter Eight

## Conclusion

The case studies that precede this chapter indicate that the churches' involvement in national-level advocacy is a relatively recent phenomena in Africa and one that has only fully emerged in the last ten to fifteen years. In this period the focus of the churches' advocacy has been, first and foremost, the replacement of corrupt and authoritarian one-party states with more just and democratic systems of governance.

This chapter draws out the factors that have been influential in terms of the mainline churches' advocacy work in the case-study countries and presents some dilemmas and questions that are raised by this research for northern church-related NGOs. Then, having reflected on some of the issues raised, the chapter looks to the future and outlines the two central challenges that are posed by this research for the churches' and for those that support them, namely: the need for churches to become more involved in advocacy for the protection and advancement of social, economic and political rights and, the need for a more holistic approach to advocacy, working from the local level through to the regional, national and global levels.

### **The Churches' Role in Advocacy in Africa: Some Key Findings and Some Challenges for Northern NGOs**

The case studies point to four factors that stand out as being particularly influential in terms of the role of churches in advocacy: the authority and legitimacy of the churches; the national-level linkages between churches and other institutions; the links churches have internationally, and the skill and capacity of individuals within the churches and ecumenical bodies to engage in advocacy work at the national level.

**The legitimacy and authority of the churches** in Kenya, Malawi and Zambia is an important factor in terms of their ability to engage in advocacy work. In these countries the widespread identification with the Christian faith by the general public gives the churches their legitimacy. As many politicians are also church members, the churches can refer to a higher spiritual authority in formulating their critique and analysis of government. Drawing on the prophetic tradition of the Church politicians can be held to account for their policies by referring to those Christian teachings which call on society to show solidarity with its poorest and most marginalised members. At times, however, the churches have developed a very close relationship with the State and those who represent the State, which has usually limited the degree to which they are able to exercise their prophetic role. Thus, where governments and their leaders have sought political legitimacy by close association and financial support of the churches, the churches' ability to criticise the government is compromised. The case studies have shown that it is important, therefore, for the churches to maintain an independent and clearly defined relationship to the State.

This raises a particular issue for church-related northern NGOs. As noted, the position of the churches in society is both a strength and a weakness. They have authority and legitimacy, but their ability to advocate on behalf of the poor can be compromised at times by their relationship to the State. Hence, should church-related northern NGOs support advocacy interventions only by their natural and traditional partners, the churches, or should they also form relationships with secular civil society organisations? Agencies seem undecided on the best course of action. Some staff commented that their decisions about whom to support for advocacy work would be made simpler if the churches could decide whether they wanted to engage in pastoral work *or* prophetic work. Yet asking church partners to decide between either one or other of these two roles is asking them to make a false distinction and may only serve to reinforce the churches' dualistic view of the world which can be traced back to its early history. This point is made by a recent INTRAC /CORAT paper which notes that 'the demarcation between the secular and the spiritual appears to be largely imposed from the outside (akin to the way colonial boundaries were imposed in the past)' (Goold et al. 1998). The reality is, however, that much of the money used by church-related northern NGOs is given on the basis that it will not be used for spiritual or proselytising work, thus forcing the distinction. Yet the dilemma is that the churches ability to engage successfully in advocacy work in Africa is the result of the legitimacy and authority it holds *because* of its scriptural and spiritual foundations and its knowledge of and rootedness in peoples' lives through its work with and presence in the community.

**National links between churches and other institutions:** The joint working of the churches nationally, for instance, through the National Councils of Churches and the Catholic Commissions for Justice and Peace, lends weight to the voice of the Church and therefore the influence it is able to exert. The *different* approaches taken by the churches can also be very effective, when in basic agreement over the need for and direction of change. However, on the other side of that coin, the diversity in opinion and approach of the various churches can also lead to divisions and contradictions that weaken their influence. Although ecumenical bodies have played very important advocacy roles, they face a dilemma, common to many membership organisations, which is that a great deal of energy is necessarily devoted to the business of coming to consensus and to the cumbersome structures that are part and parcel of their existence.

Despite the difficulties, joint work of the churches has been effective in advocating for political change. Collaborative work between churches and other non-church organisations such as: the trade unions in Zambia; the legal institute in Kenya, and with a wide range of civil society organisations in Malawi which came together to form the Public Affairs Committee, magnifies the impact that the churches are able to have on their own. Although there may be a tendency for the churches to work in isolation, where they have been able to link up with others the impact that they are able to have is greater.

**Leadership and professionalism** have been key success factors for the churches in their advocacy work. The bishops' pastoral letters, for instance, and the highly qualified and professional nature of the leadership and staff working for ecumenical organisations such as the NCK, have profoundly affected the influence that the

churches have been able to have. The way in which those at the top of the Church hierarchy have engaged the State, mobilised the press and spoken out has undoubtedly been influential. The role of the clergy and the wider church membership at the local and even regional level is, however, little discussed in the literature. This is not to say that work locally is not happening. The Catholic Justice and Peace network is clearly an important and active force at the local level, as are the DELTA programmes where they exist. In this research it is the work in Zambia, by volunteers of the Catholic Justice and Peace network, at the grass-roots level gathering data on living standards for use in advocacy interventions at a regional and national level, that illustrates the links that are possible.

**The strong international links of the mainline churches** is also a common theme that runs through the case studies. These links have been important within Africa as well as beyond. The advocacy interventions of the churches in Kenya, for instance, provided a useful example for the churches in Malawi. African groups such as the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) and the Fellowship of Christian Councils in Eastern And Southern Africa (FOCCESA), are also important in that they are able to provide solidarity with and support for the actions of churches nationally. The links to churches and related organisations in Europe have also been important, both for raising issues on the international agenda and for mobilising the resources necessary to facilitate their work.

Funding is, of course, very necessary if the churches are to carry out their work. However, the fact that these funds come almost entirely from international donors begs the question whether African churches are now more accountable to their northern donors than to their members. It also leads us to ask to what degree northern partners are now setting the development and advocacy agendas of the churches. Another outcome of the churches' dependence on international funding has been the tendency of the churches to centralise their activities, in some cases to such a degree that a detachment from the grass roots results. For advocacy work, as with other forms of development work, detachment from the grass roots is a serious problem and one which is considered in more depth below.

The very rapid growth of some church development departments and ecumenical bodies, on the back of northern funding, can lead to a number of organisational problems for the churches. The NCKK faced a number of these problems, problems which are problems commonly experienced by church development departments. The distancing of development departments from the wider church can, for instance, be problematic since the Church is the very body that gives them their legitimacy. Also the imbalance in resources between the development departments and the rest of the church can cause envy and resentment among some clergy, and the lack of clarity about how development departments and ecumenical bodies relate to the rest of the church can cause a skewing of the churches' mission and a weakening of the overall church body (Goold et al. 1998). This poses an additional question to northern NGOs as to whether they should support, not only projects and programmes, but also a strengthening of the capacities of church organisations, for instance, through a process

of organisational development.<sup>8</sup> Although the capacity of the churches for advocacy work was, admittedly, portrayed by northern NGOs as being rather weak the case studies show, to the contrary, that in spite of some of their perceived weaknesses the churches have had a very significant impact in this field. The question of the need to support the churches in an organisational development process is more a question of ensuring that the advocacy or justice and peace work of the Church is rooted in the context of its other development and pastoral work.

This brings the discussion back to question of how northern NGOs relate to their church partners in Africa. This research suggests that the relationship between northern NGO staff and churches would be greatly improved if the NGOs had a better understanding of: the nature of their church partners as organisations (organisations encompassing a whole range of groups from the grass roots to the national level) and the position of these church partners within wider society. Most northern NGOs are now debating how best they can improve their communications with partners. The main issue they would like to resolve is how to improve the quality of their communications with partners in order to ensure the provision of appropriate funding, funding which can be suitably accounted for without burdening partners with unmanageable reporting requirements. They suggested setting up field offices in order to be closer to their partners, or organising for more frequent field visits to be carried out. However, an increased northern NGO presence might not always have a wholly positive impact on partners' roles and relationships and therefore needs to be given due consideration. Whatever mechanisms are decided upon, a key factor would seem to be the need for the northern NGOs to understand better the nature and position of the churches in the societies of which they are a part. An examination of two areas in particular is suggested.

## **Future Issues**

### **Social, Economic and Cultural Rights**

The findings indicate that in the last ten to fifteen years there has been an increasing interest and involvement in advocacy work on the part of the churches in Africa. This coincides and is related to a period of political change in sub-Saharan Africa. During the 1980s and 1990s the authority and legitimacy of the one-party states that had been in power since the end of colonial rule were being challenged by a wide range of civil society organisations: the media, youth movements, lawyers, the business community, trade unions and churches. During this period the churches often played a central role in speaking out about injustices and abuses of power. A young Togolese student, writing in 1990, commented that:

We were taught in the lecture rooms of our universities that only strong governments can transform the underdeveloped economic condition of Africa. Thirty years have gone by ... and the first generation leaders have mostly acquired personal wealth and violated human rights, neglecting fundamental liberties while nurturing their own personality cults ... We cannot (now) afford

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<sup>8</sup> The dilemmas around organisational development processes, for northern partners and for the churches themselves, are examined in a recent paper by INTRAC / CORAT, September 1998.

to be indifferent on the eve of a new century when Africa will be called upon to join the community of nations in a commitment to sustain justice and peace for God's creation. (AACC 1992)

This was the opening statement in an All Africa Conference of Churches workshop on advocacy held in 1992. The emphasis was clearly being placed on the need to transform the *political* systems that were governing people's lives. The wider literature bears this out; it is the role of the churches and related organisations in advocating for people's **civil and political rights** that is noted. And amongst the NNGOs interviewed it was also initiatives related to these first-generation rights, as opposed to the second-generation social, economic and cultural rights, that were most frequently discussed.

The case studies in this report are clear illustrations of the churches' involvement in the arena of civil and political rights. The focus of most of their advocacy work at this time was straightforward, they wanted one-party systems to be replaced by democratically elected governments through free and fair elections. In Malawi and Kenya the churches' role was clearly about advocating for this transition to multi-party democratic rule. Although in Zambia the focus of the case study was on economic rights, the role of the churches in advocating for changes to the structure of governance forms the backdrop to that work.

Through the churches' development programmes and their close contact with parishioners they witness abuses of peoples' **social, economic and cultural rights**. An analysis of the root causes of the problems people face as a result of their social, economic and cultural factors, often leads to an awareness of the need to advocate for changes to the prevailing structures and institutions, systems which are seen to frustrate individuals' and organisations' wider efforts to eradicate poverty and promote human development. Although addressing civil and political rights issues may be an important part of a process, a change of government or political structure or change in law does not in and of itself necessarily lead to the protection of and adherence to social, economic or cultural rights. It is now almost universally recognised that the categorising of rights into first-generation, civil and political rights, and second-generation social, economic and cultural rights, was a legal and pragmatic convenience rather than a reflection of reality. The reality is that all categories of rights relate to and have a bearing on each other and for any advancement in their protection they should be seen as indivisible. So, although the case studies show the influential role that the churches have played in bringing about structural changes, the questions raised by this research are:

- Do the churches and their partners in both the North and the South have a commitment to advocating for improvements in the field of social, economic and cultural rights?
- Or is it that development agencies and the churches themselves see advocacy as synonymous with their involvement in issues related to civil and political rights only, whilst seeing their service delivery and development work as the route to ensuring people's social, economic and cultural rights are met?

- And if the churches do want to be involved in helping people to hold the prevailing structures to account, ensuring that the poorest are not further marginalised, what is the most effective way of advocating to ensure their social, economic and cultural rights are protected?

The case study of the churches' role in Zambia begins to address some of these questions in relation to the Zambian context. However, much more research is required, in Zambia as well as in other countries, if they are to be more fully answered.

### **From the local to the global: a holistic approach**

It would be impossible to identify all those changes that might be required on a local, national and international level to bring about the eradication of poverty and the advent of a more just, peaceful and equitable world. Much more work needs to be done both on a theoretical and practical level to establish the chains of cause and effect. But perhaps what can be said with some certainty is that:

Action will be required concurrently at a series of different levels: at the grassroots, at the local and regional level, at the national level, across poor countries, within industrialised countries of the north and beyond the nation-state. (Riddell 1993)

Now that governments, more or less democratically elected, are in place across much of Africa the challenge is to ensure that they are held to account by those whom their policies affect. 'How can the poor majority reach the makers of public policy?' this is the development question of the 1990s, or so thought a participant at the AACC workshop on advocacy in 1992. Such a question, they pointed out, was substantially different to the one asked in the 1970s which was: 'what are the best ways for the State to reach the poor?'

It is, however, precisely the question of how the poorest and most marginalised in society can be assisted in their efforts to make their voices heard, that is discussed the least in the literature. Indeed, there is little available research on the grass-roots advocacy work of the churches and when northern church-related agencies talk about the kind of advocacy work that they support, it is hardly ever about grass-roots mobilisation or support of advocacy initiatives at the local level. It is instead predominantly about high-profile, high-level lobbying of governments and international agencies, by an elite. In Kenya it is the actions of the NCK and of several outspoken bishops that are highlighted; in Malawi the Catholic bishops' pastoral letters are accredited with being the catalyst for the democratisation process, and in Zambia it is the ecumenical bodies involvement in discussions with government that takes centre stage. This is not to say that local-level advocacy initiatives do not exist. They certainly do. In some places they may be very strong and a vibrant part of the churches' advocacy work. An investigation of the nature of, and extent to which, advocacy is taking place at a local level was outside the scope of this study since material for the case studies was gathered through only secondary rather than primary data. And since very little is written about how, for example,

churches are dealing with land rights issues in a particular dioceses and how is this informs the work of, for instance, the National Church Councils and the WCC at the international level this has meant that this part of the churches' advocacy work could not be properly considered or analysed.

There are several arguments, however, that can be put forward regarding the importance of supporting and strengthening advocacy work at the grass-roots. First, advocacy initiatives that are concerned with improving the conditions and upholding the rights of the poorest, should involve the poor. Ideally the affected communities should demand a change in, or be encouraged to resist for themselves, those policies which adversely affect them. And if others are to speak on their behalf they should at the very least be listened to and their views and messages understood. It is particularly important if southern NGO and church leaders claim that they are genuinely representing the voice of the poor, that they do genuinely represent their voices. Although a direct link, for instance, from the international level to the local level is not always possible, and only sometimes desirable, vertical linkages between the local and regional, regional and national, national and international levels are important. These vertical linkages, alongside horizontal links at all these levels between those who are interested in advocating on the same or similar issues are also important since they can serve to consolidate action and improve the chances of a positive outcome.

Development programmes that are underpinned by an empowerment agenda have advocacy as a integral element. Such Programmes, for instance the DELTA<sup>9</sup> programmes which have their roots in Latin American liberation theology, can be very effective in raising people's awareness of the issues affecting their lives. However, raising awareness about issues is only the first stage; motivating and helping communities to take charge of their own lives is the next. The question as to why such programmes are not widely referred to or written about needs to be asked. Perhaps the fact that such programmes lead not only to a challenging of power structures locally, but also to a questioning of the nature of power within the church itself, is a factor. Whether advocacy interventions at the local level are successful at bringing about a positive change in areas communities identify as needing attention still needs further investigation.

For many northern church-related NGOs, although advocacy is a key element in their policy documents, in practice it is marginalised, not only by being seen as separate to core development business but also by having very few resources allocated to it. And indications are that there is still a tendency for the advocacy work of southern-based organisations and churches to be seen as something that is done by those at the top of the Church and the NGO hierarchy, whilst development work is seen as something that is done by those at the grass-roots. This separation of the development and advocacy agendas, the gap between local-level and national-level advocacy, in practice if not in theory, presents both churches and NGOs with a wide range of dilemmas, programmatic and organisational.

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<sup>9</sup> DELTA - Development Education Leadership Training for Action - often draws on the three volumes of *Training for Transformation* (1984, 1995) by A. Hope and S.Timmel.

Questions about the churches' grass-roots advocacy work that are posed by this research are:

- How successful are the churches' grass-roots advocacy initiatives in bringing about change locally?
- What contribution are these local initiatives able to make in the churches' regional, national and international initiatives?
- How well are the churches' grass-roots advocacy initiatives linked to non-church actions?
- What are the issues around how they organise these initiatives within the structure of the churches locally?
- How can northern NGOs work with churches at the national and regional level to ensure that they are able, in turn, to make appropriate links with grass roots churches, both for supporting their advocacy work locally and in order to ensure their participation in regional, national and international advocacy initiatives?

Finally, this paper suggests, therefore, that further work is needed to determine what role and particular contribution churches can make to advocacy work, and what resources, both human and financial, might be required to:

1. protect and enhance social, economic and cultural rights, and
2. promote the involvement of those at the grass-roots.

Case studies based on primary research which examine the role of African grass-roots churches - both the mainline and African independent churches - in advocacy within the overall context of their other work, and the work of the regional, national and international Church, would be particularly informative. By comparing different cases a clearer understanding of the organisational and other factors both preventing and promoting effective advocacy work by the churches at the grass-roots level and beyond, would be revealed. The implications for the policy and practice of northern church-related NGOs could then also be drawn out.

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# Appendix 1

## People interviewed for this study

Action on Churches Together

*Nils Carthesen*

Bilance

*Peter de Keijzer*

*Martina Benschop-Jansen*

Bread for the World

*Mr Hess*

*Mr Möller*

*Mr Lindau*

*Mr Weitekämper*

Cafod

*Henry Northover*

Christian Aid

*Paul Renshaw*

*Sarah Hughes*

*Tony Dykes*

Church World Service

*Rebecca Larson*

CIDSE

*Jean-Marie Fardeau*

CORAT

*William Ogara*

DCA

*Kristian Pedersen*

EZE

*Eberhard Hitzler*

*Volker Kasch*

*Carola Donner Reichle*

*Uwe Asseln-Keller*

*Monika Hoffmann-Kühnel*

ICCO

*Aad van der Meer*

Lutheran World Federation  
*Mr Msomi*

Misereor  
*Rolf Goldstein*  
*Michael Kippler*  
*Christiane Overkamp*

NCA  
*Gaim Kebrab*  
*Stein Villumstad*  
*Knud Jorgensen*

Tear Fund  
*Andy Atkins*

World Council of Churches:  
*Melaku Kifle*  
*William Temu*  
*Mariette Grange*

World Vision  
*Susan Barbour*  
*Alan Waites*

*Shirley De Woolf*

*Fr James Oporia-Ekawro*

*Paul Gifford*

*Terence Ranger*

*Fr James Tengtenga*



