Confrontation, Co-operation or Co-optation: NGOs and the Ghanaian State during Structural Adjustment

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This article examines relations between non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and African states, with particular reference to Ghana, during a period of structural adjustment and neo-liberal hegemony in Africa. The growing number of NGOs in Africa, and the concomitant shift in international aid away from African states toward NGOs, places these new institutional actors at the heart of debates concerning democratisation, civil society, economic liberalisation, the role of state, and the nature of nation-state sovereignty in an era of a World Bank/IMF condominium in Africa. Building on the work of Fowler and others, the article examines NGO-state relations in Ghana in detail. It argues that NGOs fit in perfectly with the neo-liberal agenda for Africa. With the state under attack from above and below, a new struggle for resources and power is being waged between NGOs and many African states, with, as the case study of Ghana shows, the outcome, in this transitory period, far from certain.

There is clear competition for declining aid resources between the state and local and foreign NGOs. The self-preservation instinct plays to the ben edit of those that wield the instruments of power (Integrated Social Development Centre, Accra, Ghana (ISODEC) 1995).

Scan the traffic in any African capital city and one will be struck by the number of Land Rovers, Patrols, Pajeros and Land Cruisers belonging to aid agencies and NGOs. While this gives one an inkling of the extent of NGO operations, recent figures show the huge amount of resources and sheer numbers of NGOs operating in Africa. For example, over US$1 billion was channelled through NGOs in Africa in 1986 (Bratton, 1989:570). Worldwide, more than US$7 billion is channelled through NGOs, equivalent to 16 per cent of bilateral aid flows, with most official aid agencies giving 10 per cent or more of their aid money to NGOs (Clark, 1991:74; Farrington, 1993:26). During the 1980s funding to NGOs grew at five times the rate of official development assistance overall (Fowler, 1992:15).

That the rapid growth in the NGO sector in Africa parallels the era of structural adjustment and the roll-back of the state is no mere coincidence. As this article will argue, the burgeoning NGO sector fits perfectly into the thinking of anti-statist structural adjustment driven by a free-market ideology. They are private organisations, allegedly less corrupt and more efficient and democratic than the state, are often ‘entrepreneurial’ in nature, and provide social welfare services in areas in which the state has withdrawn. Their piecemeal and uncoordinated approach to
social welfare provision is the exact opposite of centrally-planned state provision. As such, they are proving to be at the centre of current debates on democratisation, civil society, economic liberalisation, the role of state, and the nature of nation-state sovereignty. In many ways the emergence of the NGO sector presents a direct threat to a weakened African state. I argue that it is the explicit project of many international donors, through increased NGO funding, to undermine the African state from ‘below’, while it is undermined from ‘above’ through a loss of legitimacy and sovereignty caused by World Bank/IMF mandates.

This article has two major aims. First, to build on the recent work of Fowler, Bebbington, Copetake and Wellard and others, to show how NGOs fit into a neo-liberal agenda in Africa involving structural adjustment and the rollback of the state (Fowler, 1992a; Bebbington, 1993; Bratton, 1989, 1990a; Copetake, 1993). Second, to demonstrate through the example of Ghana, how a new arena in the struggle for power and resources is being created, pitting African states against NGOs, and how this struggle is playing itself out in its early stages in one country. Ghana in many ways has served as a ‘development laboratory’ for structural adjustment and planned political liberalisation. It has been hailed as a rare African ‘success story’ for economic reform (it has been pursuing a World Bank/IMF programme for 12 years) and, in 1992, experienced a nominal democratic transition after 10 years of military rule.

In attempting to describe the complexity of NGO-state relations in Africa, my argument contains a seeming contradiction. I argue both that the African state is being weakened considerably from above and below, and that using its remaining coercive and bureaucratic power, it has been able, at times, to co-opt and control the growing NGO sector. I believe both processes are occurring simultaneously and are not mutually exclusive. The fact that most African states perceive NGOs as a threat to their power and legitimacy is a sign of their very weakness.

**Acronym City: The Rise of the NGO Sector in Africa**

*For some, NGOs are in the vanguard of an alternative mode of development that is fundamentally different from today’s neo-liberal orthodoxy; other lines of reasoning see NGOs playing roles within the existing neo-liberal framework* (Farrington, 1993:1).

NGOs have gained prominence in the recent development discourse on Africa for many reasons. The international economic orthodoxy promoted by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the implementation of structural adjustment, has led to the increasing withdrawal of the state from the economic sphere, and a de-emphasis of state-led development strategies, with the World Bank view being that the state should restrict itself to providing a ‘sound macro-economic and legal framework’ for investment (World Bank, 1989, 1991, 1994). The reduction in state activity in terms of ‘service delivery’ – health, education, agricultural extension, etc. – has led to a large increase in resources to NGOs to fill the ‘service delivery gap’. In development circles, there is a consensus that ‘bottom-up’ NGOs have a comparative advantage over bloated and in efficient ‘top-down’ government ministries in implementing development projects and delivering aid and are somehow ‘closer to the grassroots’. In their perceived political role, many academics and development practitioners believe that NGOs and grassroots groups are essential building blocks in a ‘civil society’ which will serve as a countervailing force against the hegemonic ambitions of the ‘predatory’ and ‘rent-seeking’ African state (Clark, 1991). Some go so far as to argue that NGOs could be the training ground for an
'articulate and empowered middle class' essential, in the vein of Barrington Moore, for stable and lasting democratic politics (Jeffries, 1993a).

Before venturing further, let us decide what we mean by the 'overused and abused' term 'NGO'. Like much development jargon, the term is so ambiguous that it could be potentially meaningless. It has spawned an alphabet soup of related acronyms like BONGOs (business-oriented NGOs); BINGOs (big international NGOs), etc. Combining categorisations provided by Fowler and Bratton, we can devise a restricted definition which divides NGOs into four main types.

- **Community-based organisations** (CBOs) are small and intimate, often village level, organisations run by the members themselves and relying primarily on locally-generated resources.

- **Service or intermediary NGOs** are registered organisations with paid staff which provide social services to beneficiary groups or 'clients', often CBOs.

- **Intermediary NGOs** are increasingly becoming involved in advocacy and policy work. Membership NGOs, while professional, providing services and employing staff, 'are owned by those who should benefit from the services that the organisation provides.'

- Finally, **International Relief and Development NGOs** are foreign organisations, such as OXFAM or Save the Children, with 'large professional staffs, field offices in many countries, and worldwide budgets which compare in size with those of the smaller governments in Africa' (Bratton, 1989:571; Fowler, 1992:8).

The distinction between indigenous/local NGOs and foreign/international NGOs is necessarily problematic and ambiguous, although many writers subscribe to a neat delineation between the categories (While many community-based organisations carry out their work with little or no foreign money, it is the rare 'local' or 'indigenous' NGO which does not owe its survival, in all or in part, on foreign funds. While many NGOs are started purely through local initiative, other NGOs have begun as a direct initiative of a foreign funder or in response to the increased availability of resources for NGO work. Conversely, some international NGOs are quite localised in their operations, as are some local affiliates of international NGO networks. This article deals primarily with local NGOs, but recognises the links between local NGOs, foreign NGOs, and the international aid system. This typology leaves out a new breed of 'anti-NGOs' or 'GONGOs' ('government oriented nongovernmental organisations') a phenomenon which will be described later.

**Rolling Back the State: NGOs in the Context of African Political Economy in the 1990s**

The growing role of NGOs and their relations with African states must be placed within the context of recent changes in the political economy of sub-Saharan Africa. As state activity declines, NGOs, in the division of labour implied in structural adjustment, are seen by the World Bank and other development agencies as being the key institution to take up the slack in the social arena and 'cushion the blow' of adjustment (Endnote 1). As Fowler notes:

*The World Bank's strategy for poverty reduction entails helping the poor to obtain the means and opportunities they need to become productive within a national policy framework that is supportive of their efforts. The comparative advantage of NGOs should*
make them ideal institutions to assist in this endeavour. Hence, increased collaboration with and finance for NGOs is being called for by the Bank and provided by bilateral and multilateral aid (1991b:56).

With the decreased role of the state under structural adjustment, increased donor aid flows to NGOs, and internally and externally driven political change, African states and NGOs appear to be on a collision course in a new struggle for resources.

The 1980s are often seen as a ‘lost decade’ for development in sub-Saharan Africa. The decade is characterised by economic stagnation and regression, decreased public spending and greater control over national economies by foreign financial and aid institutions. With few options at their disposal, many African countries during the 1980s turned to the IFIs for financial assistance. In their new-found position of strength, they in turn used policy-based lending to force African governments to carry out far-reaching economic reforms. By the end of the 1980s, 36 of the 47 countries in sub-Saharan Africa had embarked on structural adjustment programmes (Bello, 1994:30).

The net effect of these structural adjustment measures has been a ‘rolling back’ of the state. There has been an erosion of national sovereignty as economic policy is designed in Washington rather than in the African capitals.

Where a Southern state depends on external aid rather than the national economy for its existence it effectively becomes a local government in the global political order. Sovereignty is meaningless in a situation where primary governmental functions – security, economic management, the selection and implementation of public policies – cannot be minimally guaranteed or undertaken unless externally negotiated and financed (Fowler, 1992a:26).

With the erosion of state capacity, NGOs have been seen as key actors in this neoliberal agenda. A US House of Representatives report went so far as to argue that NGOs could enlist the poor in their own impoverishment.

NGOs could contribute significantly, along with trade unions, to giving the poor a voice in the making of adjustment policy … The increasingly important movement of indigenous Private and Voluntary Organizations, along with the trade unions, offers opportunities for enlisting the poor in a renewal of structural adjustment (House of Rep. 1989:20).

NGOs have been involved in explicit ‘compensation programmes’ designed by the World Bank, international donors, and national governments in several adjusting countries to alleviate the pain involved in reform, but have seldom had a voice in their design.

In the era of structural adjustment, African governments have had to juggle multiple demands: containing discontent and protest engendered by economic reform, struggling to hold onto state power as sovereignty is eroded from above and below, and trying to meet the demands of IFIs and donors. These demands have not been limited to the economic sphere. During the mid-to-late 1980s there was agreement among the mainstream donors that political reform should accompany economic reform. A realistic interpretation of this shift would be that donors saw ‘that the models of development they wished to foster would not be consolidated unless effective demand for them could be articulated by the relevant sections of the society’ (Farrington, 1993:10). The World Bank and other donors demanded ‘good governance’ while others made more explicit demands for political reform, often linking the release of aid to political change, or at least the appearance of change.
Good governance was at first a technocratic, strangely apolitical concept concerned with reforming institutions and improving government administration, but soon took on overtly political meaning. The World Bank's dalliance with 'good governance' led it to support 'civil society' but not a strong state. The World Bank 'is unwilling and unable to look after the other side: to take state-building seriously and to provide equivalent resources to support political learning' (Moore, 1993:49). Promotion of democratisation and good governance has usually taken two forms: political conditionality and funding targeted at institutions and procedures presumed to encourage democratisation. It is the donors' second method – promoting political liberalisation by channelling aid to institutions and activities thought to foster democratisation – that leads us to a brief discussion of civil society and its relation to debates about NGOs.

Concern for democratisation leads inevitably to a search for institutions – NGOs, trade unions, professional bodies, churches, peasant movements, independent media, etc. – through which civil society can hold the state responsible for its actions. The post-colonial African state, many have argued, as the centre of resources, has been hijacked by elite interests or 'colonised' by interest groups where a patron-client system operates. Civil society, as defined by Ndegwa, is

... the collection of organizations in society that exist apart from the state and that are situated across all classes and interests and which seek to represent and advance those interests. Civil society therefore includes non-governmental organizations, private voluntary organizations, professional associations, churches and other religious bodies (1994:33).

The concept of civil society has gained currency among scholars of Africa, with the writings of Bayart on the African state, Chazan on state-society relations, and Diamond on democratisation being particularly influential (Endnote 2) (Bayart, 1986, 1993; Chazan, 1988; Diamond, 1989). Although there is little consensus on what, exactly, civil society is or how to foster it, it has become a 'hot' concept in faddish international aid circles. Donors take a more instrumentalist, less complex, view of the fabric of civil society. With the 'problem' identified – weak civil society – donors have sought ways to strengthen it, without realising that institutions such as NGOs in civil society, embedded in the same social fabric as the state, are as susceptible to similar pressures and risks of 'hijacking' by elite sections of society.

In much of the writing NGOs are seen as necessarily more democratic and participatory than the state and altruistic representatives of the rural poor, both problematic assertions, to say the least. Copetake's recent study of NGOs involved in agricultural development in six African countries found that 'few of the NGOs studied had either formal, democratic systems of choosing office-bearers, or transparent mechanisms for canvassing grassroots opinion' (Copetake, 1993:290).

Be that as it may, many donor agencies from the World Bank to USAID have jumped on the civil society bandwagon. A recent report on NGOs by the Commonwealth Foundation argues that NGOs operate 'at the interface of government and its institutions on the one hand, and civil society more broadly on the other', with intermediary NGOs intervening between government and more numerous community-based organisations (Commonwealth, 1995:17). John Clark in Democratizing Development (1991), the World Bank and others argue that NGOs 'strengthen civil society and in so doing increase the capabilities of citizen's in the South to hold politicians and public servants accountable for their actions' (Fowler, 1992a:16).
Fowler, on the other hand, is highly skeptical of any positive effects on civil society brought about by funding NGOs:

Today the assumption appears to be that funding NGOs for the socio-economic development of the poor will have a ‘leakage’ effect which will build Africa’s civil society. It would seem, however, that the array of political and other instruments available to present holders of power will plug the leaks (Fowler, 1991b:78).

Control and Resistance: Major Trends in NGO-State Relations

The threat to the legitimacy of Southern regimes if they fail to provide services to their citizens may set NGOs and poor Southern governments against each other in competition for aid (Fowler, 1992a).

In the competition between African states and NGOs, states, in charge of the coercive elements of power, are at a natural competitive advantage. Fowler speculates that ‘the combination of eroded sovereignty of poorer Southern governments and diversion of official aid to NGOs as instruments of global social welfare will heighten tensions between them, requiring a collective renegotiation of institutional arrangements for which NGOs are ill prepared’ (Fowler, 1992a:27). Increasingly, governments across the continent have been looking for ways to control and regulate NGOs. This, of course, is a difficult balancing act – governments want the increase in foreign exchange through NGOs to continue, but desire, at the same time, to avoid any threat to their hegemony. In seeking to regulate NGOs, African governments often have less than altruistic motives.

Governments are often more motivated by the desire to gain access to NGO funds, or monitor NGOs they fear as political competitors, than by a desire to make NGOs accountable to the rural poor (Bebbington, 1993:25).

From examining the experiences of NGOs in many African countries, several prominent methods of state control emerge. Bureaucratic regulation measures vary across the continent, but in most African countries local and foreign NGOs must be registered with one or more government ministries, just as any other recognised incorporated entity, be it a corporation or a bar association. While few countries have legislation which deals specifically with NGOs, this situation is now changing. Government controls have been rationalised by a need to coordinate NGO activity. (Early in 1995, a new legal framework was used in Kenya to ‘de-register’ two NGOs dealing with policy issues perceived to be a threat to the government (Lukalo, 1995:37)). Through ‘administrative co-optation’, NGOs in many African countries are being obliged ‘to have their activities approved through the bureaucratic procedures used by the government itself’ (Fowler, 1991b:67). Some governments have used open harassment to discipline what Clark calls ‘unreasonable’ NGOs, with Kenya, and the case of the Green Belt Movement, being notorious in this regard. Perhaps most effective, many African governments, politicians, civil servants, and bureaucrats have taken to forming their own NGOs – GONGOs – which, nominally independent but actually under government control, can be used to divert resources meant for ‘legitimate NGOs’.

NGOs have adopted various means to counter the predations of the state, with varying degrees of success. These efforts include keeping a low profile, forming NGO associations, relying on international links to provide credibility and protection, selectively collaborating with governments, and pursuing policy advocacy, media work and public education. In several African states NGOs have formed consortia,
coordinating bodies or umbrella organisations to present a collective voice to the government and international donors and to coordinate their activities. More often than not these attempts, notably in Kenya, Togo and Ghana, have been unsuccessful because of internal rivalries, government co-option, and the problems associated with massive funding from foreign donors, who, through ignorance or design, have not ‘institutionally strengthened’ but destroyed or distorted the growth of NGO associations in Africa.

NGO-State Relations in Ghana

A close examination of NGO-state relations in Africa is nowhere more appropriate than in Ghana, a veritable living laboratory for the free-market policies and planned political liberalisation of the 1980s and 1990s. Since Ghana is one of the best known cases of economic reform in Africa, spawning an academic sub-industry describing the success, or failure, of structural adjustment. This article provides only a brief summary of Ghana during structural adjustment.

Ghana in an Era of Structural Adjustment

When Flt. Lt. Jerry Rawlings came to power for a second time on 31 December 1981, he inherited an economy in crisis. By 1983, when Ghana’s structural adjustment programme began, the economy was near complete collapse and the state nearly bankrupt. Falling cocoa prices, declining government revenue, high levels of inflation, economic mismanagement and an unstable political climate had all contributed to the state of crisis. Faced with this situation, when Rawlings turned to the IMF for assistance, he was not negotiating from a position of strength. As a reward for following the economic mandates of structural adjustment, foreign aid and new loans have poured into Ghana creating a short-term illusion of success. In a country of only 16.5 million people, over US$8 billion in foreign aid was given to Ghana in the first seven years of the programme, making Ghana one of the most-favoured aid recipients in the world.

Structural adjustment has been a ‘boom for the few and a bust for the many’. Ghana’s traditional sources of income – gold, cocoa, and timber – have benefited from the programme, but this has only exacerbated the colonial legacy of dependence. Nearly all of the US$1.5 billion worth of private foreign investment has been in mining, with most of the profits being repatriated overseas. ‘User fees’ for health care services and education have been introduced. Disincentives to food producers, and the damage caused to local rice producers by cheap rice imports, have led to increased malnutrition and lower food security. Rapid and indiscriminate liberalisation of the trade regime has hurt local industry, while cutbacks in the public sector have shed 15 per cent of the waged workforce. Yet for all the efforts at ‘rolling back the state’, it still wields considerable bureaucratic power even after over a decade of pruning.

Rawlings has said that the essence of democracy is ‘not just paper guarantees of abstract liberties, but above all, food, clothing and shelter, in the absence of which life is not worth living’ (Ahiakpor, 1993:585). Despite many coup attempts in the early years, the regime was able to consolidate itself in the late 1980s, and Rawlings felt secure enough to talk of reinventing democracy, ‘bottom-up’ style. Under increasing pressure from within and from donors eager to see their success story unsullied by military rule, Rawlings began cautious steps towards political liberalisation. District assembly elections without multi-party campaigning, Rawlings hoped, would provide a decentralised grassroots organisation to achieve development objectives
that the state could not because of the ‘retrenchment of public sector welfare’ (Denkabe, 1993:187).

In 1991, Rawlings announced a timetable for the return to civilian rule. He effectively controlled the process appointing a constituent assembly which wrote a constitution which was approved in early 1992. When Rawling’s lifted the ban on political activity, the PNDC machinery was already set to transform itself into the National Democratic Congress or NDC, while opposition groups scrambled to organise themselves. With control of the broadcast media and the major national newspaper, and access to other state resources, Rawlings was able to win the election easily and appears set to repeat this feat in 1996.

But while Ghana’s current dalliance with ‘ballot-box’ democracy has had mixed results, civil society in Ghana has increased in strength. A lively independent press, independent radio stations, invigorated lawyers’ association and various church groups, have all contributed to a strengthened civil society. Popular protests in early 1995 forced the government to back down from implementing a value added tax (VAT) recommended by the World Bank, and NGOs and independent think tanks have slightly broadened the spectrum of debate about Ghana’s economic future.

The NGO Sector in Ghana

The evolution of the NGO sector in Ghana has its roots in the charity and welfare-oriented activities carried out by churches in the colonial Gold Coast. NGO activities increased in the post-independence period and their numbers grew rapidly during the 1980s and 1990s – a reflection of the worldwide growth of the NGO sector and increased donor attention and funding. In 1960 there were only ten registered NGOs in Ghana, while by 1991 it was estimated that over 350, excluding numerous village-level associations, were operating (Denkabe, 1993:187). While there are many NGOs, the sector is still young and rather undeveloped when compared to the indigenous NGO sector in countries such as Zimbabwe, Kenya or Senegal (only a few have competent, trained staff, a strong organisation, and good administrative and logistical capacity). Major local NGOs include the Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP) in Kumasi, and in Accra, the capital, the Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC), the Centre for Community Studies, Action and Development (CENCOSAD), and the African Centre for Human Development. NGOs span a wide spectrum of activities, from agricultural extension to environmental education. Much local and foreign NGO activity is concentrated in northern Ghana, a historically marginalised area in economic and political terms. Major foreign NGOs operate in Ghana, including Oxfam, ActionAid, World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, and Save the Children.

Government View of NGOs

We can see many of the dynamics at work in Ghana which we discussed earlier. efforts at control and co-optation by the state are juxtaposed with small victories for NGO autonomy. Under Rawlings and the PNDC, NGOs, like other sectors of civil society, had very little political space in which to operate and suffered under a generally repressive political climate. At the early stages of revolution, the PNDC viewed NGOs with suspicion, and as with any other independent body, like the church or trade unions, as a potential threat to a regime which in the beginning had only a tenuous hold on power. Several NGO activists were briefly jailed in the early days of the revolution, while many of the brightest young development activists,
including critics of the structural adjustment programme were compelled to continue their careers outside the country.

Initial government hostility turned into a more generous attitude as the adjustment programme proceeded and the ‘social costs’ became apparent. The government realised it needed to enlist NGOs in the hope of ‘cushioning the blow’ of adjustment. As long as NGOs did not stray into explicitly political terrain or overtly transformative and empowering activities, the government would allow them to operate in the ‘social’ realm. Denkabe describes the government attitude:

*While NGO activities are regarded favourably by the government, the role of NGOs is largely seen as social welfare provision and taking over responsibility for community development as government reduces the public sector. NGOs are expected to develop their initiatives in accordance with the priorities of regional and district administrations* (Denkabe, 1993:188).

The government values the resources NGOs bring to help meet the ‘service delivery gap’ but at the same time wants to circumscribe their role to the sphere of social welfare. Bridget Katsriku, director responsible for NGO affairs at the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare said ‘NGOs exist to fill in the gaps of the government’s developmental efforts’. In this view then, it is logical for the Ghanaian government to seek to ‘monitor’ (as she put it) NGOs and their activities. A Ghanaian NGO responded that ‘NGOs see themselves and are seen, both nationally and internationally, not simply as plugs for government holes. Rather, they are participants in the development process in their own right’ (ISODEC, 1995b). The government seems to have a different attitude towards local and foreign NGOs. The government is more willing to work with foreign NGOs as they are better resourced, and more established in terms of personnel, expertise, and logistical capacity. Many government departments depend on projects funded by foreign NGOs to provide them with vehicles, fuel, etc. (Canacoo, 1992:7).

Current government regulations on NGOs are minimal. NGOs are required, like other groups and corporations, to register as an entity with the Registrar-General’s Department. NGOs are also required to get a certificate to operate from the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare. In both cases, NGOs must give evidence of their constitution, indicating their aims and objectives, their internal methods of accountability and their activities (ISODEC, 1995a:4).

**NGOs and Structural Adjustment in Ghana**

In the last two decades especially, with the narrowing of the enabling elements of the state, i.e. that part of the state that gives it legitimacy (the provision of services as opposed to its coercive arms), NGOs of whatever form have filled an important economic and social vacuum (ISODEC, 1995b:18).

In Ghana, NGOs were enlisted to assist with PAMSCAD, or the Program of Action to Mitigate the Social Costs of Adjustment, a compensatory programme with clearly political aims. The introduction of PAMSCAD came at a time of growing opposition to economic reform in Ghana, with the Trades Union Congress leading the protest against mass retrenchments, extensive currency devaluation, and so-called cost recovery measures being introduced for education, health and other social services (Hutchful, 1994:582).
With donors fearful that their free-market success story would get off track, plans were made to address, or at least be seen to address, some of the negative effects of adjustment. After a meeting of donors in Paris in 1987, an international mission was sent to Ghana to assess the social impact of adjustment and PAMSCAD was established later that year. The programme targeted retrenched workers from the civil service and state-owned enterprises, the so-called ‘new poor’ and ‘vulnerable groups’ in urban and rural areas. PAMSCAD was jointly administered by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning and the Ministry of Local Government and was beset by intergovernmental rivalries. With approximately US$80 million given by donors, PAMSCAD is seen by many as a huge public relations exercise.

Indigenous NGOs have been involved in the programme and in general have been courted by the World Bank, UN agencies, and others to lessen the shock of adjustment. Donors, for their part, perceived that the Ghanaian state did not have the institutional capacity or the ‘absorptive capacity’ to implement such a large programme on its own and sought assurances from Ghanaian government representatives that NGOs would be able to take up the slack. In the division of labour of structural adjustment, NGOs were to be the ‘hands’ carrying out charity work, while the ‘head’ work was the domain of the multilateral development banks, international donors and, to some extent, the government. It is significant that NGOs were called in to participate in the PAMSCAD programme only at the implementation stage and not in the planning and design stage (Gary, 1993).

While the case of PAMSCAD presents one aspect of how NGOs and the state related to each other under structural adjustment, more light was shed on this subject at an unusual gathering of NGO leaders, top-level government officials and World Bank representatives in March 1992. These included the World Bank country representative and John Clark, formerly of Oxfam but now working for the World Bank to oversee relations with NGOs.

Those expecting NGOs to challenge the prevailing orthodoxy at this NGO ‘Roundtable on Structural Adjustment’ came away disappointed (the roundtable took place during a tense period in Ghana just prior to the lifting of the ban on party political activity, so it is perhaps understandable that there were few dissenting voices). The roundtable, organised by the Ghanaian Association of Private Voluntary Organisations in Development, GAPVOD, the umbrella organisation for NGOs in Ghana, and funded by the World Bank, had the expressed goal of identifying ‘strategies to involve NGOs in attaining the goals and objectives of the economic recovery and structural adjustment programmes’ (GAPVOD, 1992:1). Significantly, it was the first time that all these institutional actors had met together since the beginning of the economic recovery programme in 1983. Ill-prepared to discuss the issues, local NGOs did not provide, for the most part, credible criticisms or alternatives to the reform programme. Many were willing handmaiden of structural adjustment and complained most loudly about not having a larger slice of the PAMSCAD cake.

Through the statements by government and World Bank officials, it was clear that NGOs were perceived as ‘helping hands’ who could usefully serve as cheap delivery systems serving international aid and government interests. NGOs for the most part accepted this role and did not question many of the assumptions of the conference, including the idea that ‘growth equals development’. A handful of NGOs, though, called for more equitable growth and more popular participation in every stage of the recovery programme, while a few were bold enough to call PAMSCAD a public
relations afterthought. The irony of discussing ‘macro-economic policy instruments and their effects on vulnerable target groups’ in a four-star luxury hotel in the capital was lost on all but a few NGO representatives. With increasing recognition and access to the halls of power, NGOs in Ghana, as elsewhere, are at risk of being co-opted by the state and the international aid system.

**External Funding and NGO-State Relations**

With the huge amount of aid available internationally, changes in the donor agenda notably affected the shape of NGO-state relations in Ghana. The increased donor attention towards NGOs worldwide was reflected by a major UNDP mission to Ghana in the early 1990s. The mission was designed to assess the benefits of increased funding to the local NGO sector and the possibilities of NGO-government collaboration. The mission followed closely on the heels of the release of an influential UNICEF report critical of the social impact of adjustment in Ghana.

While donors were enthusiastic about funding NGOs, the Ghanaian government, of course, was lukewarm. ‘External donor agencies, such as the UNDP and the USAID, claim to have had to push the government to encourage greater roles for NGOs’ (Johnson, 1990:120). Donors do not have a free hand to support NGOs unilaterally.

*Official aid allocations to African countries are normally subject to formal agreements and written understandings ... Hence, NGOs which receive funds derived from official commitments will be vulnerable to a government’s withdrawal of its permission or more subtle pressures on donors. And, should an NGO incur the recipient government’s displeasure, in the last analysis donors will almost always terminate their funding to satisfy overriding political considerations and bilateral interests* (Fowler, 1991b:71).

There is evidence that the government in Ghana has been using its leverage with bilateral donors to determine which NGOs can get bilateral aid (Endnote 3). Government can also influence which NGOs get aid as well as denying aid to others.

*The history of ‘cooperation’ in Africa is littered with examples of governments using donor finance and technical assistance to gain control over cooperatives and integrate them into the state apparatus, with or without the best of intentions. Donors are so desperate for good projects and success stories they often will smother successful village level associations with their attention and money. Promoting role expansion and rapid growth as well as bureaucratisation can strain and undermine the special strengths and vitality to which these associations owe their success* (van de Walle, 1990:116).

An example of this process can be seen in the recent history of the Amasachina Self-Help Association, a broad-based association of village development groups based in northern Ghana. Amasachina’s success in animating hundreds of community groups with limited resources, a voluntaristic ethos and without a top-heavy bureaucratic structure, gained it the attention of the government, development ‘experts’ and researchers, and donors. The organisation was unable to cope with a massive infusion of US$75,000 from the World Bank for a feeder road project. The huge influx of money lead to corruption and power struggles within in the organisation, with the work Amasachina became famous for coming to a virtual standstill by 1993. Outside efforts to mediate the leadership struggles proved fruitless. Today, the president of Amasachina is a leading supporter of Rawlings’ ruling NDC party.
Coordination or Control: The Case of GAPVOD

With the increase in donor interest in NGOs, creating an umbrella organisation or 'strengthening' an existing umbrella organisation in Ghana became a priority. Examining the development of GAPVOD, the Ghana Association of Private Voluntary Organisations in Development, provides an example of how NGOs, the state and the international aid system relate to each other. The experience of GAPVOD shows how a nexus of interests can distort the growth of an umbrella organisation and the NGO sector as a whole.

GAPVOD was founded in 1980 by 14 NGOs, mostly foreign and church-based groups, as a forum for information sharing and coordination of activities. Gradually GAPVOD evolved from simply an NGO forum to a service providing organisation, notably providing training in management and other skills to member NGOs. Growth remained stagnant – GAPVOD had only 17 members in 1987 – until 1988 when the government and UNDP sought to enlist NGOs in the PAMSCAD programme. By 1987, criticism of adjustment was mounting and there was tremendous political pressure to strengthen the NGO sector through funding an umbrella organisation.

In three years from 1990 to 1992, GAPVOD received over US$600,000 through a special UNDP project known as the 'NGO Management Service Unit' which was to provide training to GAPVOD and member NGOs (Gary, 1993; Fowler, 1991a). Gradually, GAPVOD leadership began to pay more attention to its funders at the UNDP and the government than to its own constituency – the organisation and the 'project' became indistinguishable. In addition, GAPVOD became completely dependent on one source of funding. As GAPVOD became controlled by a small cabal, undemocratic decisions and leadership moves alienated rank-and-file NGO members. For example, members were not informed about entering into an agreement with the UNDP, which had major ramifications for the organisation, until three months after the project had started. (The project itself was flawed in that it was a counterpart training programme but there were no GAPVOD counterparts to train.) The 'strengthened' GAPVOD was used as a tool of control, rather than coordination, by the government and international donors.

[GAPVOD] has met a mixed reception from the NGO community, since its objectives often reflect the administrative needs of government and international donors rather than of local communities and NGOs (Denkabe, 1993:188).

The organisation became not a collective voice of NGOs but a way for the government and donors to speak at local NGOs. Negative sanctions were visited upon those NGOs which did not join GAPVOD. Coercion by various donors compelled many NGOs to reluctantly join and remain in a group which they felt was unrepresentative of the views of the bulk of the indigenous NGO community. The UNDP's resident representative in Ghana at the time explicitly told NGOs that if they were not registered with GAPVOD they would be ineligible to receive money from any of their funding windows (such as Africa 2000) (Gary, 1993). British Council scholarships, and other such opportunities, were only available if the organisation was a member of GAPVOD. Notably, the two top officials at the GAPVOD secretariat during the funding boom were former high level government bureaucrats – one with the Ministry of Local Government and the other in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning. The latter used his ties with that ministry to secure multilateral development aid from the UNDP. As Bratton reminds us, 'In Africa, where public resources are allocated along personal or patronage lines, the most useful ties are informal ones' (Bratton, 1990:108).
In the course of three years and US$600,000, GAPVOD (a necessary umbrella organisation whose natural growth was distorted through aid for political expediency and control) became a discredited, undemocratic, super-NGO bureaucracy. UNDP suspended funding in late 1992 and it had not been restored by 1995. There have been efforts to revive GAPVOD as an independent NGO association but, as of 1995, it was a shell of an organisation with no full-time employees.

31st December Women’s Movement: From ‘Revolutionary Organ’ to ‘Non-Governmental Organisation’

The story of the 31st December Women’s Movement provides a fascinating example of an organisation transforming its image – while maintaining its core role of supporting the ruling party – to adapt to a changing political climate and a shifting donor agenda. The movement is the most prominent example of a GONGO in Ghana – a governmental non-governmental organisation, a oxymoronic phenomenon mentioned earlier. GONGOs could be the wave of the future in many African countries, Fowler argues.

The shrinkage in external resources to African governments increases the likelihood of GONGOs being created as a way of capturing part of the NGOs expanding financial stream (Fowler, 1991b:69).

The 31st December Women’s Movement, named after the date of the 1981 coup, was founded during 1982 as one of the ‘revolutionary organs’ supporting the Rawlings revolution. By 1984 Rawling’s wife, Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings, assumed the presidency of the movement and it became similar to the ruling party women’s leagues in many African states. The movement aims to educate and support women in various ways, and its activities include setting up day care centres and promoting income generating projects. The movement’s development activities are clearly peripheral to its role in supporting the PNDC. In the run up to the 1992 multi-party elections, the movement was instrumental in drumming up support for the ruling party.

In 1987, it was described as a ‘non-governmental organisation, one of the organs the revolution gave birth to’, but its aims and objectives according to its leaders were identical to those of the PNDC ... a direct result of the movement’s political practice is the easy access to state facilities and resources which it enjoys for its work (Tsikata, 1989:87).

The movement, of course, received extensive material support from the state, usually travelling at state expense. While promoting itself as an NGO, many of the movement’s organisers are on salary of various state ministries while working full-time for the movement. Gyimah-Boadi notes that by the late 1980s ‘[the movement] appeared able to commandeer some of the resources coming into the country from international donors to support programmes for women’, receiving support from the UNDP, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and others (Gyimah-Boadi, 1994:136). As the political climate changed in 1992, ‘revolutionary organs’ were no longer the norm in a ‘multi-party democracy’ so the movement began to remake itself into an ‘apolitical’ NGO. The first lady, though, appeared frequently on national television during the race for the presidency opening day care centres and other projects in thinly veiled campaign appearances. While the movement is commonly seen as a branch of the ruling party, those publicly questioning its ‘non-governmental’ nature have felt the wrath of the first lady, as when, for example, the groups membership in GAPVOD was questioned (Gary, 1993).
The 31st December Women's Movement is the largest and most egregious example of a GONGO. Many former and present civil service staff and bureaucrats are in prominent positions in NGOs and use their connections to negotiate resources from the international aid system. In 1995, a nearly US$1 million project funded by the Danish government in the Upper West Region of Ghana, was implemented in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and local NGOs. Many Ministry of Health officials and other government workers have set up their own ‘community groups’ or ‘NGOs’ to garner some of the money that donors are so eager to feed into the sector.

The NGO Bill – A Victory for 'Civil Society'?
In early 1995, the Ghanaian government, in a move very similar to what has occurred in several other African countries, began circulating a draft ‘NGO Bill’ which aims to coordinate and control NGO activity. The bill, further evidence of the continued hegemonic ambitions of the state and increased competition for declining levels of external aid, has created a storm of controversy and resistance from the NGO community, extra-parliamentary opposition parties, and others interested in promoting civil society. While the government says the document is merely a ‘discussion paper’, many NGOs see it as a direct attack on their autonomy (African Agenda, 1995:50).

The bill, if drafted into law, would make it mandatory for all NGOs working in Ghana to register with an ‘advisory council’, stacked with government officials and appointees, which would have the power to deny registration to an NGO if it is not satisfied that ‘the organisation is willing and able to work in cooperation with any agency of state that the Minister [for Employment and Social Welfare] may direct’ (Yeboah-Afari, 1995:882; ISODEC, 1995a:1). The bill also defines NGOs in a narrow sense as ‘any voluntary organisation or body of persons ... which is non-political, non-partisan, non-profit making and which aims at improving the quality of life of the inhabitants of the country’ (ISODEC, 1995a:3).

NGOs responded vociferously to the proposed bill, organising seminars and press conferences, appearing on televised debates, and distributing publications critical of the bill. Foreign NGOs also reportedly threatened to pull out of Ghana if the bill became law (Biney, 1995). The bill has been attacked as unconstitutional on several grounds, including violating provisions protecting the freedom of association. The Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC) in Accra has spearheaded the fight against the bill, saying:

The definition of NGOs in terms of welfare, non-partisanship, and political involvement, are vague enough as to seek to preclude NGOs from questioning central government policy as part of their efforts to deliver welfare ... The bill is not an innocent attempt to help NGOs liaise better with themselves and government. On the contrary it is a mechanism designed to get them to fit in with government’s designs (ISODEC, 1995:3).

ISODEC's director, Charles Abugre, said that in the midst of partisan politics, NGOs provide a non-partisan moral voice which 'is a potent instrument of civil society for keeping repressive and corrupt regimes in check'.

For the moment, NGOs appear to have been successful in their campaign to get the government to shelve the proposal. The successful campaign is a reflection of both the growing boldness of many NGOs in confronting government and tackling controversial national policy issues and the increased strength of civil society in Ghana since
1992. This is demonstrated through the independent media and outspoken civic organisations. The response of some NGOs to the threat against their autonomy is in marked contrast to their tepid showing at the 1992 NGO roundtable. Several Ghanaian NGOs now have active policy advocacy, research and publication programmes (Endnote 4). Indigenous NGOs may win this battle, but may end up losing the war as the state looks for less obvious methods or control and co-optation.

**Conclusion: NGO-State Relations as an Arena of Struggle for Resources and Power**

Changes in both African and international political economy and shifts in the international donor agenda have thrust NGOs into a new position of prominence. Declining terms of trade and the effects of structural adjustment have seriously eroded the economic sovereignty of African states and severely curtailed the extent to which African states are involved in the ‘development project’. Political liberalisation and political conditionality emphasising ‘good governance’ and strengthened civil society have also whittled away at the hegemony of the African state. NGOs, in their perceived ability to deliver ‘development’, foster participation, promote civil society, and lessen the social costs of adjustment on ‘vulnerable groups’, fit neatly with the international donor agenda to weaken the African state.

Massive inflows of aid to NGOs have meant that the burgeoning NGO sector has become a new arena of accumulation for a small number of African elites. As the state shrinks in size and controls fewer resources, and NGOs grow in number and scope and control greater resources, the stage for conflict is set. In the concrete example of Ghana, we have seen how these conflicts are beginning to play themselves out in an African state going through structural adjustment. While NGOs have grown in strength and received increased funding, many have been co-opted by the government and enlisted in the project of cushioning the blow of adjustment. The Ghanaian state has sought direct and indirect ways of controlling the sector and, through the creation of GONGOs, has been able to appropriate some of the funds flowing to NGOs.

While rolling back the state in Africa is an actually occurring process, rumours of the state’s demise may be exaggerated. As more resources for the ‘development project’ are funnelled not through the state but through NGOs, the state will seek new levers of control. Concerning the role of the state in development, the question arises: should African states have the legitimate right to regulate the activities of local and foreign NGOs? Would not reformed state institutions be more efficient in providing social welfare services, let alone planning development, than scattered NGO efforts? I believe so, although reform-minded states would face the double-bind of redefining their institutions while trying to maintain their sovereignty. Opportunity and support to carry out such reform is not likely in an era in which, as Fowler has argued, African governments will become local governments with very limited functions in the globalised international economy.

Hopes that the NGO sector will be an independent, democratic force which will counteract state power may be misplaced. There are growing signs that the elite in Africa, accused of hijacking the state for its own narrow interests, may ‘hijack’ the NGO sector as well. Many NGOs are already run by middle-class, educated urban elites, and few operate along democratic lines. As van de Walle has argued,
There is little evidence that associations in civil society do not operate within the same "social logic" as state institutions, that their officials distinguish between the private and public spheres any more than state officials' (van de Walle, 1990:117).

We have also seen how well-placed bureaucrats and politicians have been able to take advantage of the growing interest in NGOs.

While the new conflict for resources and power between African states and NGOs is in its early stage, and no firm conclusions can be made, I believe the state has a natural advantage. Through the use of bureaucratic power, administrative co-optation and in some cases coercive force, state-centred elites are in a clear position to gain, rather than lose, from the shifting donor emphasis towards NGOs. Some analysts of African political economy speak of the existence of a 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' depending on access to state resources for its existence. What we may be seeing in the 1990s is the emergence of a new 'NGO bureaucratic bourgeoisie' dependent on the huge amount of money now flowing to the NGO sector in Africa, rather than a hoped for new 'articulate and empowered' middle class. To use Bayart's 'politics of the belly' metaphor, if a large part of the 'national cake' is now being baked in a different oven, it stands to reason that African elites will be visiting the new bakery.

Endnotes

1. Fowler argues that 'structural adjustment promotes a division of tasks between institutions - commercial, governmental and non-profit - according to their perceived comparative advantage in market-led, equitable development. Free enterprise is the economic engine, governments provide infrastructures and a regulatory apparatus, and NGOs secure equity by targeting and assisting groups that are marginalised by the adjustment process' (1991b:79).

2. Bayart (1986:120) provides a salutary description of what it would take to transform civil society in counterpoint to those - the World Bank et al. - who see the 'strengthening' of civil society as a 'technical' quick fix for Africa's problems:

   "Civil society can only transform its relation to the state through the organisation of new and autonomous structures, the creation of a new cultural fabric and the elaboration of a conceptual challenge to power monopolies. This can only be achieved by means of ideological and institutional 'mediations', and 'mediations' of new categories are nothing less than schemes for the reconstruction of identity and the plural invention of modernity."

3. Staff members of several NGOs whose work often brings them into conflict with existing government policy told me they had been denied the opportunity to make use of bilateral aid.

4. ISODEC, an Accra-based NGO, has recently launched a weekly newspaper, Public Agenda, which competes with other independent and government-owned papers. Its consistently excellent reporting has critically analysed government actions, social and economic policy, and the structural adjustment programme. Environmental organisations have also been active in confronting the government, most notably the Green Earth Organisation and Friends of the Earth-Ghana.

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