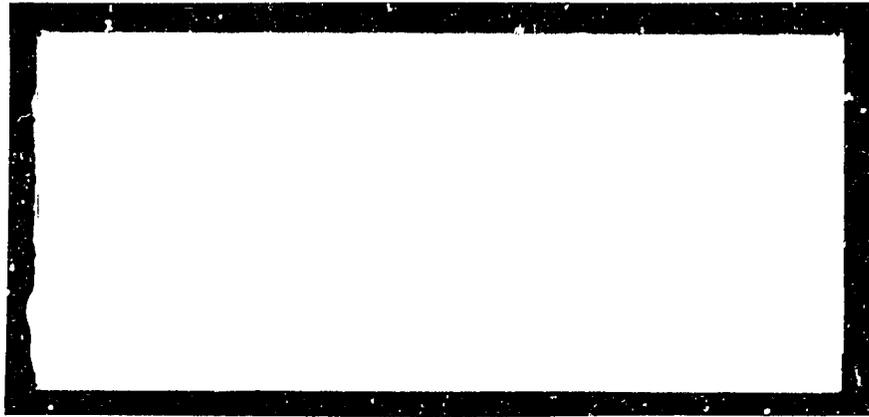


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**A Review of
"Poverty, Organization and Policy:
Towards a Voice for Africa's Rural Poor"
by
Michael Bratton
for the Michigan State University Colloquium**

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Poverty, Organization and Policy:
Towards a Voice for Africa's Rural Poor

Michael Bratton

for the Michigan State University Colloquium

OVERVIEW

In Bratton's words, "this paper seeks to open a discussion on the conditions under which poor people can influence policy." It is, for the most part, a summary of truisms which are reconfirmed by the case studies of three organizations established to serve the interests of the rural poor. Bratton's last section is his best, in which he makes policy recommendations to donors concerning appropriate ways to support NGOs.

HIGHLIGHTS OF PAPER

The poor lack the "clout" to make their own preferences stick and generally find themselves subjected to the decisions of outsiders.

Community-based organizations which may be effective because they function within the boundaries of kinship-based groups, have difficulties in "scaling up" to become national NGOs. This is due to the effects of expansion which brings strangers into the group, and to the inexperience of group members to operate in the highly political institutional environment.

Lessons from Case Studies

1. Federated membership organizations are the only form of organization to possess both local roots and a channel for articulation of demands to the policy center.
2. Advocacy organizations are likely to be most credible and effective if they specialize in particular policy subject areas.
3. Alliances with senior political leaders are necessary, but the most useful ties are informal rather than formal.
4. Organizations tend to attain economic sustainability -- and also policy voice -- to the extent that they build a domestic base of financial support.

What Should Donors Do?

1. Big donors and small NGOs "make uncomfortable bedfellows by virtue of unbridgeable differences of scale, ethos and capacity." The entry of multilateral and bilateral donors into the local voluntary sector is not necessarily helpful and should be discouraged.

2. If official donors insist on entry, they should do so indirectly, through third-party intermediaries. Appropriate means of providing funding include: small grants rather than large loans; multi-year program grants rather than short-term project grants; foreign exchange as well as local currencies; coverage of recurrent as well as capital budgets; and flexible procedures for financial reporting.
3. International NGOs should gradually adopt a "catalytic role" rather than an implementation role of rural development programs. They should help build indigenous institutional capacity among national NGOs.

Poverty, Organization and Policy: Towards a Voice for
Africa's Rural Poor

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INTRODUCTION

It is now fifteen years since Robert McNamara called for "new style" agricultural and social projects for the World Bank's poorest members and since the U.S. Congress charted "new directions" to address the basic human needs of the poor majority. Much water has flowed under the development assistance bridge since then. The major Western donors, pulling African governments in their wake, have promoted a new development strategy which emphasises economic growth above social equity and macro-policy reform above the implementation of micro-projects. Experience with poverty programming in the 1970s showed that the established aid bureaucracies and centralized African governments were organizationally ill-equipped to work creatively at the rural community level. Since that time the donors have consequently reassigned the task of working among the poor to the growing phalanx of non-governmental agencies with programs in relief and rural development in Africa.

During the period that official development assistance took a "project approach", donors were willing to acknowledge that successful development outcomes depended in part on active "participation" by "beneficiaries". But the opportunities for broad-based involvement have all but disappeared as the pendulum of rural development decision-making has swung back from the farmers' fields to the corridors of financial power where "policy dialogue" takes place. Economic policy reform in Africa has usually occurred out of earshot of the small direct producers and consumers who have the most at stake in the reform process. At the same time, the non-government organizations (NGOs) who work closely with the poor are accumulating substantial experience about what works and what doesn't work in rural development in Africa. And a few among them are beginning to seek an explicit role in policy advocacy. Whereas the organizational challenge in rural development in the 1970's was "how can we reach the poor majority?", it is likely to be recast in the 1990s. The challenge now is "how can the poor majority reach the policy-makers?".

This paper therefore seeks to open a discussion on the conditions under which poor people can influence policy. In order to make this vast question more manageable, I define the problem in the following, more restrictive, terms: Under what organizational conditions have small producers in East and Southern Africa been able to obtain a voice in the formation of agricultural and rural development policies? Obviously, evidence of effectiveness of community-based organizations at policy tasks is likely to be modest and formative at best. But I believe that certain national NGOs are beginning to gear up for policy dialogue. As David Korten has noted, there is now a "third generation" of NGOs that seeks to orchestrate sustained development by linking efforts in the public, private and voluntary sectors (Korten, 1987, 149).

There are three parts to the paper. The first proposes general relationships among some key concepts -- poverty, organization and policy -- in the context of the practice of induced rural development in Africa. The second section contains case studies of three organizations established expressly to serve and promote the interests of selected social groups among Africa's rural poor. And the final section analyses the organizational factors that seem to contribute to relative success or failure in building a capacity to engage in policy debate.

In other words, I ask:

1. How does poverty manifest itself politically in rural Africa?
2. What steps have the rural poor begun to take to organize themselves?
3. What organizational strategies have enabled the poor to obtain a voice in making policy ?
4. How should donors respond?

PART ONE: SOME CONCEPTS

Poverty As A Political Condition

Poverty is a political condition as well as an economic one. To be sure, poverty manifests itself in shortages of property assets, in fluctuating flows of cash income, and in mean and meager living standards. But poverty also arises because people do not have access to power -- which can be understood as the capacity to do what you want and to win compliance from others. They have little or no control over the material and institutional conditions under which they exist. They experience great difficulty in making authoritative decisions about their own lives. In short, the poor lack the "clout" to make their own preferences stick.

As is well known, rural dwellers in Africa face a harsh and uncertain physical environment. Populations of rural poor are disproportionately distributed in ecological areas that are marginal for agricultural production by virtue of low rainfall, poor soils and sparse vegetation cover. The poorest of the poor are preoccupied with the dilemma of obtaining a reliable supply of food, if not for tomorrow, then for next month or next year. The plans of even the best-established farmers are regularly disrupted by the vagaries of the seasonal rains and the ravages of marauding tropical pests.

But, in addition to natural factors, the institutional landscape in rural Africa is populated by the political and economic monopolies of the postcolonial State whose actions can also be rough and capricious. These institutions take various forms: closed and uncompetitive political parties, centralized and bureaucratized government extension services, or inefficient parastatal and cooperative marketing agencies. Paradoxically, while these monopolies claim an exclusive legitimacy, their performance is generally weak. Rather than helping to alleviate uncertainty in the environment faced by rural dwellers, the formal institutions of the State usually act to reinforce and intensify it.

Let me illustrate. As rural Africa is increasingly incorporated into wider economic and political systems, the nature of poverty, subsistence and livelihood changes. People begin to purchase scientific technologies for use in agricultural production and to buy processed foods in for consumption in the daily diet. In so doing, the potential sources of uncertainty in household well-being begin to multiply. Entry into the cash economy usually requires rural folk to sacrifice a degree of autonomy for dependence on centralized service delivery systems that do not always perform as promised. Throughout Africa, for example, dryland cultivators regularly suffer the late delivery of fertilizer and seed which inhibits the planting of crops in time

to take full advantage of the short seasonal rains. And, after the harvest is over, the same cultivators might find that the official agricultural marketing board or cooperative is unable to make fair or timely payment for surplus crops that are sent to market.

Moreover, the rural poor are generally find it difficult to correct such inefficiencies and inequities in service provision because of their disadvantaged power position. In competition for scarce development resources, the rural poor invariably lose out to local social elites, national political elites and international development experts. These actors have greater influence than the poor over the discourse of rural development, the definition of policies, and the design of rural development organizations and programs. The poor lack access to the arenas in which policy is made and to the administrative bodies that allocate resources in the rural sector. Rather than being in a position to articulate their needs, they generally find themselves subjected to the decisions of outsiders and under compulsion to comply.

Organizations of the Rural Poor

A common human response to uncertainty is to spread and diversify risk. Across the African continent, rural people have responded with the classic "peasant" strategy of standing with one foot forward in the market while resting the other foot firmly in the domestic economy. Small farm households hedge against uncertainty in various ways: by growing both food and cash crops, by storing wealth in large livestock holdings, by migrating for wage employment in town and, increasingly, engaging in off-farm income-generating activity within the rural locality.

People also characteristically respond to uncertainty by endeavoring to enclose and control the environment. Individuals who discover the limits of isolated action may be led to combine with others in concerted effort. In this way, organizations are built. As William Smith has said, "organizations are instruments for bringing together people who see their involvement as a means of achieving (common) purposes" (1981, 15). And, following Smith, it is important to add that organization-building is unavoidably political. It involves actors in exercising power to maximize control over the factors that affect the realization of shared goals, and seeking to influence -- through lobbying or alliance building -- those factors which cannot be directly controlled.

Organizations can arise from many locations in society, not just the elite center. Yet most analyses of contemporary African "crisis" focus only at the macro-level -- on drought, national political instability and international debt -- and overlook and underestimate the potential contribution of micro-organizations. Yet there are examples across the continent of ordinary people tackling their plight in creative ways. Particularly in the stronger economies and more open political systems, community based-organizations are taking collective development action. In Kenya since 1963, for example, the harambee (let's pull together) movement has been effective at constructing rural infrastructure, particularly schools. In Zimbabwe since 1980, mushandira pamwe (working together) groups have

contributed to a remarkable growth in agricultural productivity and output from the peasant sector.

Such organizations draw cohesion and legitimacy by building on existing forms social organization and adapting their procedures to traditional norms of reciprocity. As labor migration has drawn ever larger numbers of men from the African countryside, for example, cooperation beyond the nuclear family, particularly among women, has become essential. Traditional work parties have increased in importance and have sometimes provided nuclei upon which more ambitious forms of organization can be built. As community groups employ collective action to remove one set of development constraints -- for example the shortage of labor -- so other constraints are revealed -- such as the high price or unavailability of improved technology. These circumstances challenge community-based organizations to take on new tasks, such as the mobilization of savings to purchase capital goods or the self-provision of transport services to carry technical inputs from factory to field. By "scaling up" in this fashion, voluntary associations are sometimes able to construct alternative channels to market or decision-making centers that bypass unreliable State institutions. And if they can create -- or connect with -- a like-minded institution at the national level, the prospects are greatly enhanced for exercising a measure of power in wider market and State arenas.

The difficulties faced by community-based organizations in "scaling up" to become national NGOs should not be underestimated. At least three fundamental problems arise in organization-building from below in rural Africa. First, organizations invariably encounter internal social conflicts that arise when boundaries are expanded beyond kinship-based groups to encompass "strangers". Second, organizations are commonly crippled by desperate shortages of professional skills -- in planning, resource mobilization and financial control -- that inhibit their effectiveness at development tasks. And finally, as organizations grow, leaders must learn to maneuver in the highly political institutional environment in which State- and donor-sponsored rural development occurs in Africa. The overarching issue here is a search for organizational structures and processes that combine professionalism with participation. After all, NGOs in Africa are only likely to be effective in a policy debate if they can demonstrate both technical competence and an organized political constituency.

Towards Policy Voice

Let me expand on this last point. Planners and economists define policy formation as a technical undertaking which rests on the specification of predictable relationships between resource inputs and expected outcomes. In theory, this model of policy-making applies formal appraisal techniques -- usually some variant of cost-benefit analysis -- to a range of possible resource investments and chooses the most promising outcome. Yet policy-making is also a process in which decision-makers respond to real and perceived pressures from the political environment. Politicians apply criteria of political rationality to resource allocation decisions by seeking the policy alternative that maximizes returns in terms of political support and maintenance of power. In any real world situation, where planners and politicians interact, one would therefore expect actual policies to be made through a combination of "facts" and "clout".

In Africa in the 1980s, outsiders have enjoyed the loudest voice in policy debates about agricultural and rural development. International donors and lenders have initiated the structural adjustment reforms that have opened up agricultural markets to the free play of supply and demand. In some cases, African policy-makers have recognized the efficiency of such reforms and have implemented them on the grounds of persuasive economic rationality. In other cases, African leaders have been more concerned with the political costs of market liberalization. They accept reforms reluctantly, and then only because international development agencies exercised the power of political leverage in the form of policy conditions to loan agreements.

But where are the so-called "beneficiaries" in this process? Where, for example, are the small farmers in debates about commodity prices and modes of agricultural service delivery? The alternative to an externally-driven policy formation process is one in which representative organizations of rural producers are able to make their own views known. Ironically, small farmers would often push for some of the same policy measures advocated by international agencies -- especially higher producer prices and multiple marketing channels. At the same time they are likely to oppose other elements of the liberalization package, for example the removal of subsidies on agricultural inputs and rural transport. But the main point here is that policies that result from a domestic policy debate would be far more likely to be sustained by an African government in the long run. Policies arrived at by this route would respond, not only to economic criteria of efficient resource use, but also to political criteria of building or reinforcing a government's support base in the countryside.

The likelihood that small rural producers can gain an effective policy voice depends on a number of necessary contextual conditions. First, agriculture must occupy a dominant position in gross domestic production and national export revenues. Secondly, small producers must contribute a substantial and growing share to the total marketed output of food and cash crops. Thirdly, there should be a tradition of producer representation on the government monopolies established to control the agricultural and rural sectors. Fourthly, the arrangements for national governance should include enforceable constitutional protections for freedom of expression and voluntary association. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there should be rough congruence between government policy objectives and the goals of the voluntary associations of the rural poor.

These supportive conditions for participation in policy formation obviously do not pertain in many African countries. The African State is highly centralized. Independent associations -- even if organized for expressly developmental purposes -- rarely receive official encouragement. Moreover, the executive arm of the State is relatively "overdeveloped" in relation to representative institutions. Access to policy making arenas is therefore more likely to be available through bureaucrats than through party officials and parliamentarians.

Yet, even in authoritarian regimes in Africa, there may be some room for rural dwellers to modify policies during the implementation process. The

postcolonial African State is rarely capable of enforcing its authority throughout all the rural reaches of the national territory. There is a lengthy line of command between the administrative center and the rural periphery which opens opportunities for on-the-spot bargaining on program implementation between administrators and clients. And, beyond the outer reaches of state penetration, there is abundant unoccupied "space" in the rural areas in which informal organizations can arise. Government field staff often find it convenient to make use of such organizations as one way of ensuring service coverage in situations where there is limited logistical support from headquarters. In return, local organizations are sometimes able to alter the planned allocation of resources and thereby "remake" policy in the course of its implementation at the local level.

One last word on policy "voice". I take this concept to mean more than "claim-making", which can be understood as expressing effective demand to attract resources from an existing programs into a particular locality (Uphoff and Esman, 1984, 80). Instead "voice" means seeking to introduce a new rural development program or the significantly modify the goals, terms or procedures of an existing one. Effectiveness at policy influence can be adduced if such changes are seen to occur.

But "voice" also means less than "empowerment". This concept is used with rhetorical abandon but little analytical precision in the current literature on development administration (Bryant and White, 1982, 16-17; Chambers, 1983, 131-139, 163-167). If "empowerment" is taken to mean the capacity to get what you want, it would only seem to be an achievable goal in a local context where community-based organizations can sometimes effectively challenge a traditional power structure. The rural poor in Africa generally do not face local elites that are as economically entrenched or as class conscious as those in South Asia or Latin America. But the concept of "empowerment" exaggerates and raises unfulfillable expectations in the context of national politics in Africa. Any overt effort to rearrange the allocation of resources on which the modern State power structure rests runs the risk of inviting repression. As the case studies below will show, influence is likely to be more productive than confrontation. Effective leaders of non-government organizations in Africa have generally sought to identify openings in the administrative system and to cultivate non-adversarial working relations with the politically powerful. They have been able to articulate the needs of the poor only in the context of a declaration of loyalty to national development goals. In this way, the powerless have sometimes been able to achieve at least part of what they want.

PART TWO: CASE STUDIES

The Savings Development Movement (SDM)

In the 1960s, when Zimbabwe was still Southern Rhodesia, a Jesuit priest got together with a banker and a university lecturer to launch an experimental scheme to encourage the mobilization of financial resources in rural villages. They proved to be an unusually effective team of change agents: the lecturer provided the ideas, the banker the professional skills, and the priest the moral suasion. Their chosen instrument was the Savings Development Movement (SDM) which, as a registered cooperative society, nicely complemented the policy of the new Zimbabwe government after 1980 to encourage the formation of cooperative enterprises. SDM's assets, however, were held by a private non-profit corporation registered under the Companies Act.

The approach promoted by the Savings Development Movement is simplicity itself. Rural people with a common neighborhood bond gather weekly to contribute small amounts of household money into joint savings accounts for deposit at the nearest thrift institution. All transactions take place at public meetings and group members, the majority of whom are non-literate, keep records by sticking colored stamps into savings books. Within a year the group has usually accumulated sufficient savings to place a bulk order for seed and fertilizer. The group then organizes collective work parties to rotate round members fields for planting, weeding and harvesting and, through careful regulation of husbandry methods, to improve the output of food and cash crops (usually maize and groundnuts). The most advanced savings clubs are sometimes able to diversify into cooperative consumer stores, bakeries and other income-generating enterprises, and to sink wells and build dams for community use.

After Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, the savings movement expanded dramatically at a rate of ten to fifteen new clubs per week to an estimated total of 5700 clubs nationwide in 1984 (Chimedza, 1984, 20). Since each club had 25 to 35 members, the total size of the movement at its peak can be conservatively estimated at a quarter of a million persons. The overwhelming majority -- perhaps as many as 97% (Chimedza, 1984, 19) -- are women. The SDM employed a skeleton staff in the two main cities of Harare and Bulawayo to advise grassroots groups on how to deal with national institutions like banks, fertilizer companies and extension services. With financial support from European church donors and a local fertilizer company, SDM also printed and distributed savings books and ran training courses in savings and crop husbandry at its modest training center on felicitously-named Nirvana Road in the capital city.

The SDM leaders can claim several truly outstanding achievements. First, they helped give birth to one of the only spontaneous and autonomous grassroots peoples' movements Africa. The members form their own savings clubs, manage their own financial affairs, and answer administratively to no one. The staff never handles any of the members' money. The lean SDM advisory service was set up only to respond to the clubs' requests for information and training and, with a three-person staff, was never intended, nor able, to control them. And, by becoming office-holders in savings clubs,

women are able to move beyond their traditional status in the community as vatorwa (outsiders) and adopt decision-making positions. At its peak the movement was so popular and diffusion of the savings idea so rapid that SDM staff could never do better than guess at its full extent.

Second, SDM devised and disseminated an effective, low-cost method for promoting capital formation and agricultural investment among the poor. The SDM experience demonstrated that small farmers can adopt improved agricultural methods without borrowing money and running the risk of falling into debt when the rains fail. And, in a culture where women have few rights to control assets independently of their husbands, savings clubs have enabled women to gain financial independence.

Finally, the savings movement achieved policy impact. Instead of attempting to build up an independent field staff, SDM forged linkages after 1980 with the two government agencies with the largest field presence: the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs. The SDM executive and staff played an important intermediary role in bringing the savings club success story to the attention of the authorities. Focussing their lobbying efforts at the level of the Provincial and District offices of the field ministries, they built a core of supporters for the savings methodology. Provincial and District officials had discretion to make program innovations in their own localities, and by 1985, the two key ministries had adopted savings training as a standard extension approach in at least four of Zimbabwe's eight provinces. As the Ministry of Community Development and Women's Affairs grew in stature and its field staff expanded, it became the main instrument for the broad institutionalization of a development education method that derived initially from the NGO sector.

SDM also attracted donor interest and this helped to broaden its policy impact. In 1985 the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) showed strong interest in supporting savings training nationwide, but the plan was ultimately dropped for lack of funds. By 1987 the Konraad Adenauer Foundation was poised to inject large amounts of money and technical assistance to build an expensive regional savings support infrastructure. And, on the strength of demand for agricultural inputs from savings clubs, SDM was also able to help convince two national fertilizer companies to alter their marketing strategies to include peasant farming areas.

Sadly, the very success of the savings movement in Zimbabwe attracted so much attention that, by 1985, the government found it necessary to intervene. In May of that year the Registrar of Cooperatives invoked Ministerial authority to "suspend" SDM operations on the grounds of misuse of donor funds. An auditor's report and court judgement later confirmed that there was no substance to the charge. Instead, the government's objection seems to have really rested on the way that SDM organization had been constituted. With some justification, the Registrar argued that the Board and Executive of SDM were self-appointed and unaccountable to the members of the primary savings societies. And, as a group of three white males at the head of a staff and membership composed of black women, the organization was insufficiently representative of the diversity of the social order in Zimbabwe. In addition, the government was correctly suspicious that Wycombe's registration as a non-

profit company was a ruse to protect its assets from possible seizure by the Registrar of Cooperatives. There was nothing illegal in this procedure, but it came to be perceived as a challenge to the government's authority to regulate NGOs.

By 1987 the authorities were able to force changes in the governance of the savings movement by installing its own candidates on the Board of a reconstituted Savings Development Foundation (SDF). At the time of writing it was unclear what effect these changes had had on the women in the grassroots groups. Casual observation suggests that the strongest and longest-standing groups were able to continue their collective activities without outside support, but that newer groups were collapsing in the absence of training, advice and a reliable supply of savings books and stamps.

The National Farmers' Association of Zimbabwe (NFAZ)

Colonial agricultural extension policy for Africans in Southern Rhodesia emphasised the development of a class of independent yeoman smallholders in the marginal African "reserves". In 1926, the first Director of Native Agriculture, Emory Alvord, established a scheme to introduce scientific production methods -- ox-plowing, manure application, mono-cropping, and crop rotation -- into indigenous farming systems (Mutimba, 1982, 3). The graduates of the Alvord program came to be known as "Master Farmers" and were awarded certificates and badges to attest to their newly-won status. They were among the most productive agricultural producers and, to the extent that restrictive colonial legislation allowed, were among the only smallholders to regularly buy and sell in national markets. Their certification also gave them eligibility to apply for freehold tenure plots in the African Purchase Areas.

In the 1950s, the then Ministry of Native Affairs began to encourage Master Farmers to form themselves into village-level groups for purposes of disseminating agricultural information and for bulk ordering and marketing. The groups drew members from areas small enough to be traversed by foot or bicycle, and attracted those interested in market-oriented agricultural production. By 1970, in Victoria (later Masvingo) area in the south-east, these farmer-led clubs began to federate into a larger-scale organization at the level of the administrative Province. In 1980, this nucleus of farmer organization expanded to the national level with the formation of the National Farmers Association of Zimbabwe (NFAZ). At the same time, the first NFAZ President, Mr. Robinson Gapare, responding to criticisms that his Association represented only the small farmer elite, mounted a drive to broaden the organization's membership, for example by dropping the the requirement of Master Farmer certification and explicitly seeking to attract women farmers. By 1986, the Association recorded a membership of more than 31,000 paid-up member households, some 150,000 other participants (out of a total of some 900,000 peasant households) and about 4,000 clubs nationwide.

The NFAZ program played a part in the remarkable upsurge in peasant agricultural productivity in the first five years of Zimbabwe's independence. The Association helped sponsor an informal process of technology diffusion which resulted by 1985 in large proportions of peasant farmers using hybrid

maize seed (95%) and chemical fertilizers (61%) on at least one of their fields (Bratton, 1986, 378). The NFAZ also assisted farmers to navigate around unreliable service delivery agencies by organizing their own transport for supply and marketing. Not only are group farmers significantly more likely to than individual farmers to use fertilizer, but they are also more likely to obtain it directly from an urban supplier at a cheaper price. The improved access to agricultural technologies and services that is facilitated by farmer organization, leads ultimately to higher agricultural productivity and incomes. In 1982 in NFAZ's heartland of Gutu District, Masvingo, group households produced more than twice as much maize -- and sold more than seven times as much -- as individual households.

Building on this success, the Association is currently in the process of opening field offices in every province and employing organizers to help close "the information gap...between members and local authorities" and to enable "participation in policy formulation at various levels" (Gapare, 1987, 2). For the first time the NFAZ has promoted women into provincial leadership positions and held leadership training for office bearers in farmer clubs. The Swedish Cooperative Center provides funds and technical assistance for organizational expansion and field offices and International Voluntary Services placed two advisors with field staff to assist farmer groups to identify and implement cooperative projects.

On the policy front, the colonial government intended the Association to serve only as a "downward" channel for agricultural extension and not as an "upward" channel for representing and publicizing small farmer needs. Before 1980 extension officials repeatedly warned the Association's leaders that government financial support would be cut off if they sought to establish a farmer's union that dabbled in agricultural politics. But the articulation of policy voice has been on the agenda from the time that Master Farmer clubs gained African leadership and began to federate. The 1980 NFAZ constitution explicitly aims to "make known (small farmer) problems and views".

And NFAZ effectiveness at policy influence must be noted. In 1976, the Association secured an exemption for its members from sales tax on agricultural inputs on the grounds that, like large-scale commercial producers, they contributed to national food stocks and export revenues. The NFAZ also played a part in the repeal in 1978 of the African Development Fund Levy which taxed the crop and livestock sales of small farmers and which encouraged the growth of illegal markets. In 1980, the NFAZ won government agreement that African farmers could sell crops directly to the Grain Marketing Board without passing through the slow and expensive channels of official Cooperative Marketing Societies. In 1984 the NFAZ led a successful bid to have sorghums and millets, produced as staple grains by the small farmers of the low rainfall zones, included as "controlled crops" for purposes of official pricing and collection. In the same year it won access to land resettlement schemes for its members for the first time. And the Association became centrally involved in planning major transport and marketing operations such as the national USAID-funded program to build "collection depots" in the smallholder areas and the government-coordinated trucking effort to bring in the bumper harvest of 1985.

The potentially strategic policy position occupied by the NFAZ is perhaps best illustrated by its participation in annual agricultural price negotiations with the government's Agricultural Marketing Authority. To date the NFAZ has relied for information on farmers' costs of production from the Commercial Farmers Union, even though the small farmer's cost structure differs from that of the large-scale producer. It has therefore established a small Economics Department at its headquarters to gather relevant information on the input, labor and transport costs faced by its members in an effort to differentiate and specially represent their needs.

The Association can claim without exaggeration to be the only independent and national small farmers union in eastern and Southern Africa. Its legitimacy derives from a membership base in every province of Zimbabwe, including contested and neglected Matabeleland, and from the fact that leadership is elected the members at all levels. Taking due note of these strengths, the Government has recognized the Association as the official voice for all low-income farmers in the communal and resettlement areas of Zimbabwe. The Prime Minister invited the NFAZ President to sit on Boards of key parastatals such as the Agricultural Marketing Authority and the Natural Resources Board, and to serve on a National Commission of Inquiry into the Agricultural Industry.

At the same time, several weaknesses threaten the NFAZ's effectiveness over the long term. The Association is overly dependent on its charismatic and politically adept leader. It needs both to beware cooptation by government and to establish a sound management system at its national headquarters. Despite the broadening of its popular base, NFAZ has not entirely shed its elitist image. Its local financial base is also in need of strengthening, especially by improving the collection of dues beyond the 20 percent of "members" who currently pay. These issues will be taken up in the analysis at the end.

Voluntary Agencies Development Assistance

Of all African countries, Kenya has always had the largest population of voluntary associations with programs to serve the poor (Bassan, 1985). These range from community-level harambee groups that mobilize capital and labor for local self-help projects, to national social welfare bodies like the to international non-governmental organizations with regional relief and development programs budgeted at many millions of dollars. The "good works" of these organizations are inhibited, however, by a common set of management problems such as, inter alia, vague goals, a lack of skills for project preparation and management, and unreliable systems of financial control.

In 1983, in an effort to address these problems, 23 voluntary associations in Kenya agreed to establish a common management services agency to be known as Voluntary Agencies Development Assistance (VADA). With Bethwell Kiplagat, Kenya's Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs as Chairman of the Board, and Jacob Mwangi, an experienced private sector manager, as Executive Director, VADA aimed at three principal objectives: to provide management training and consultancy services, to serve as a conduit for donor agency funding to community-based NGOs, and to engage in a policy dialogue with government on behalf of the voluntary sector and the poor.

Between 1984 and 1987 VADA made modest progress. It held more than thirty seminars and workshops for senior and middle-level NGO staff covering topics such as small-scale business development, participatory evaluation, and the integration of women into development project management. VADA also launched a newsletter, in part to promote VADA itself, but also to offer a forum for information exchange among NGOs involved in rural development. With donor funding, VADA initiated a scholarship program which provided staff development opportunities to NGOs, and which were initially awarded to organizations affiliated to the ruling political party, such as Maendaleo ya Wanawake (Organization of Women), and the Kenyan government, such as the Kenya National Council of Social Service (KNCSS). During the same three year period, VADA's staff in Nairobi ballooned from 2 to 24 persons.

There were also efforts to promote a policy dialogue. VADA was one of seven co-sponsors of the "Enabling Environment" conference in Nairobi in October 1986. Attended by delegates from around the world, the conference explored ways to improve communication and cooperation on development concerns among the public, private and voluntary sectors (Aga Khan Foundation, 1986). In addition to this special event, VADA held an annual semi-private retreat in which NGO leaders were selected to discuss issues of shared concern and to interact with senior government officials. Out of one such meeting in 1986 a Standing Committee of Kenyan NGOs was formed to work out permanent mechanisms for relating to government and donors, and to conduct policy research on NGO performance in sectors such as primary health care, domestic water supply and income-generation.

In each case VADA targetted elite decision-makers at the political center: the President of the Republic of Kenya, for example, opened the international conference proceedings. To the disappointment of the NGO representatives present, however, he confined his remarks to the potential contribution to be made by the private, "for profit" sector. VADA also relied heavily informal access to the highest reaches of government through its Board Chairman who was a forceful public and private advocate of NGO approaches to rural development.

At first glance VADA would seem to have usefully occupied a heretofore empty niche among development organizations in Kenya. But VADA's achievements must be weighed against a worrisome set of interrelated and fundamental organizational problems. To a greater or lesser extent, these problems can be traced back to the organization's relationship with its primary donor. In 1985, VADA received \$12 million over seven years from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to administer a program of sub-grants (\$50,000 to \$100,000 each) to community-based organizations. The relationship with USAID took the form of a "cooperative agreement", a legally tight contractual arrangement which subjected VADA to close and regular scrutiny by the donor.

The infusion of vast amounts of foreign aid -- the largest grant ever received by a Kenyan NGO -- had a perverse effect on the development of an organization whose mission and objectives were blurred from the outset. The Executive Director never set clear priorities among the organization's

multiple goals: was VADA first and foremost a technical service agency chartered to provide management training? Or was it a representative membership organization created to allow NGOs to speak out on policy issues? The adoption of grant-making functions on behalf of USAID led to further confusion about VADA's purpose and, ultimately, to a loss of organizational direction. Over time, the staff were increasingly diverted from delivering management services to devising internal management procedures to satisfy the donor's demands for financial control.

Moreover, VADA never succeeded in winning the full confidence of its clientele. The formation of the organization was announced with great fanfare at a Nairobi hotel reception without adequate advance consultation with the NGO community. And VADA did not subsequently extend coverage beyond its two dozen original sponsors; it neglected the remainder of Kenya's 400 voluntary agencies. Whatever legitimacy VADA did eventually accrue, however, was grievously undermined by the USAID connection. USAID-Washington insisted on a tortuous grant approval process which inhibited VADA from delivering a single grant in the first two and a half years of its operation. Prospective grantees also had to register their organizational particulars with Washington, a requirement that Kenyans, inside government and out, regarded as an unwarranted intrusion into the private affairs of a sovereign state. And, finally, the appointment of an American Assistant Director of VADA's development fund was widely interpreted as a lack of trust in the donor-host relationship and further called into question the identity of VADA as a free-standing Kenyan institution.

In fairness, it must be stated that USAID's concerns about the leadership and capacity of VADA were not entirely misplaced. For an organization purporting to train others in management skills, VADA itself was badly managed. The Executive Director failed to build a sense of organizational coherence and staff loyalty within the ranks. The senior professionals on VADA's Management Committee complained of "the mentality of one-man management" and of inaccessible, corrupt and arbitrary decision-making. Affairs came to a head in February 1987 when, in open revolt, a senior staff delegation carried their complaints to the donor. In retaliation the Executive Director, backed by the VADA Board, dismissed the rebels for "gross insubordination". This management crisis shook the organization to its foundations and seriously compromised its relations with existing and potential donors. By the end of 1987, for example, USAID decided to suspend funding to VADA and to seek an alternative instrument to execute its small grants program in Kenya.

PART THREE: ANALYSIS

Strategies for Policy Voice Compared

The three organizations whose stories have been capsulized above have clearly achieved different degrees of effectiveness at policy influence. Crudely speaking, NFAZ would have to be judged a success, SDM a partial success and VADA a failure at securing a realignment of policy and a reallocation of development resources in favor of groups among the rural poor.

Given such different outcomes, I am led to enquire into the factors that contribute to effective policy advocacy. As indicated earlier, there are contextual factors deriving from the prevailing economic and political conditions of the host countries. In recent years, for example, there has been relatively stronger congruence between the goals of government and national NGOs in Zimbabwe than in Kenya. This clearly helps explain why the two cases of relative "success" are located in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe had a new and enthusiastic regime which saw the poor as its constituency and which actively promoted cooperative organization as a means of building popular support; Kenya had an older and more defensive regime which gradually became preoccupied with protecting privilege, in part by controlling the independence of popularly-based and externally-funded NGOs.

In the hope that this paper will resonate among a general audience, I intend to de-emphasise the contextual factors in the African environment and concentrate instead on selected characteristics of the policy advocacy organizations themselves. In this analytical section I try to explain impact on policy in terms of organizational structure, program and linkages.

Structure of Organization

The three case studies illustrate an emerging species of development agency, which I have described elsewhere as a "national NGO" (Bratton, 1987, 5). This type of non-governmental development agency is distinguishable from a community-based group which is informally constituted and run by the members themselves. Instead, a national NGO possesses both a legal identity -- usually as a registered non-profit enterprise -- and a small professional staff which provides support services to community groups, for example in the form of management training, information exchange or policy representation. The national NGO is also distinguishable from an international NGO by the concentration of its headquarters and field operations in one country and a permanent staff composed entirely of nationals.

Because they perform "umbrella" functions for a network of community-based organizations, national NGOs may take on a federated organizational structure. Much depends on whether the organization is chartered and owned by its members. Of the three cases studied here, a basic distinction must be drawn between SDM and NFAZ on the one hand, which can be described as "membership organizations" (such as NFAZ and SDM), and professional "service" organizations (such as VADA). Rural dwellers belong directly to the primary associations of SDM and NFAZ at community level; VADA has no such members, being a consortium of urban-based professionals with a common interest in alleviating rural poverty. Membership organizations are much more likely to erect a federated structure from below, though the extent to which this actually happens may vary considerably from case to case. Federated membership organizations are the only form of organization to possess both local roots and a channel for articulation of demands to the policy center. It seems reasonable to propose that federated membership organizations are most likely to have an effective policy voice.

Let us analyse the three cases in the light of these distinctions. The strength of SDM is that it is a bottom-heavy organization in which the center

of gravity for decision-making rests in rural villages. SDM's weakness is that the horizontal and vertical ties among savings clubs are very loose; the movement has yet to effectively "scale-up" beyond the primary club level. As it is, members are currently unable to have a voice in either the selection of national SDM leadership or in policy discussion with government officials outside immediate field localities. The VADA structure displays an opposite set of limitations. The leaders of the organization were selected according to criteria of professional qualification and set themselves up in business without reference to any popular mandate. VADA is a top-heavy organization with a capital city office and no institutional presence in the rural areas beyond short-term consultancy visits. It enjoys access to high-level policy-makers but its clout on policy issues is severely constrained by its lack of a popular base.

Of the three cases, only the NFAZ can make a credible claim to be a federated membership organization. It is founded on a network of grassroots clubs, has an intermediate structure of district and provincial committees, and a national presence in the form of an office in the capital city. Most importantly, the leadership at all levels is chosen by the members or their elected representatives which endows the national spokesmen of NFAZ with a mandate to speak on behalf of small farmers. This is not to say that, the structure of NFAZ is firmly institutionalized; it is still a new and fragile organization whose presence in certain rural areas dates back no more than two or three years. The provincial offices do not always operate reliably and the NFAZ President still cites intermittent communication between center and grassroots as the organization's biggest problem.

Scope of Program

One of the most reliable generalizations in the field of development administration is that organizations that begin with clear and simple objectives are most likely to be effective at their chosen tasks (Grindle, 1980, 287). The current case studies would appear to bear that generalization out. The Savings Development Movement is the best positive example. SDM dispenses information on the specialized subject of savings, leaving the technical aspects of agricultural extension to government staff trained for that purpose. The original leaders even ruled out loan-making after an initial unfavorable experience with credit unions and observing the high default rate in agricultural credit schemes in drought years. The single program focus is underpinned by a straightforward method for recording savings transactions that is accessible even to the non-literate. It remains to be seen whether the new SDF leadership regime maintain a tight program scope; already the new directors seem inclined to move beyond SDM's traditional concern with savings and to enter the realms of credit and marketing for agricultural and off-farm enterprises.

The case of VADA indicates what can go wrong if clear limits to program scope are not defined and adhered to. Far from delimiting a realm of specialized activity at which the organization could excel, the VADA leaders tried to be all things to all people. Because there was no clear program focus, the leaders were tempted by the ready abundance of donor funding to accept another organization's agenda, in this case as small grant-maker for

USAID. Under these circumstances, VADA's goals not only multiplied, but became mutually contradictory. As a policy advocate, VADA needed to build procedures that would allow community-based organizations to set policy priorities and hold VADA politically accountable. But as the organization transmuted into a quasi-donor, VADA actually developed lines of accountability that ran in the opposite direction to the overseas headquarters office of its major financial backer.

Whereas the NFAZ started with a single task -- the diffusion of technical innovations to small farmers -- it added functions as it grew. In this case, however, the guide to expansion has been the articulated needs of its clientele. Small farmers in Zimbabwe have stated clearly that the principal constraints to increased output are not technical knowledge, but access to land, cash, draft power and markets (Bratton, 1987, 191). NFAZ has therefore chosen to focus its recent efforts on improving the terms of trade of small farmers in agricultural markets. To this end, the newly-established Economics Department has begun to develop a data-base on small farmer costs of production by crop and region. Because of staff inexperience, NFAZ had to turn to the Department of Agricultural Economics at the University of Zimbabwe for technical assistance in this task. Ironically, with a staff of professionals and social scientists, VADA was far better equipped than NFAZ to take on a range of complex tasks, including that of policy analysis. But the professionals in this organization were always underutilized.

We may conclude that advocacy organizations are likely to be most credible and effective if they specialize in particular policy subject areas. There is, however, no hard and fast rule which stipulates that an organization cannot change or expand its substantive focus, particularly if this reflects the changing needs of its clientele. But as national NGOs expand their program scope, they will inevitably have to accelerate the transition from a volunteer to professional staff. One viable alternative is to enter a "working group" with other institutions in the non-profit "third sector" which can provide professional guidance on how to enter into unfamiliar policy terrain. But the main point stands: national NGOs are only likely to be effective at lobbying on subjects on which they possess or can call on proven expertise.

Composition of Clients

It is plausible to suggest that the social composition of an organization's clientele affects whether it can act as an effective advocate for the poor. In order to predict an organization's effectiveness as an advocate, we would want to know whether it services the absolute poor, the relatively poor, or the non-poor .

Of the three cases, the Savings Development Movement clearly has the strongest record in reaching the poorest rural dwellers. The composition of savings clubs in Zimbabwe is overwhelmingly female and many are widows or heads of households where the husband is absent. Due to customary laws and practices, rural women in Eastern and Southern Africa generally lack assets in land or cattle and are required to provide labor on cash crops, the income from which is often appropriated by men. In addition, women are expected to

provide for the basic human needs of children, with or without support from the spouse. As a means of ensuring that savings clubs remain open to poor women, SDM guidelines suggest that no member can deposit wage remissions from a husband working in town or accumulate savings worth more than ten percent of the groups total account.

The National Farmers Association serves a different clientele. By definition, the Master Farmers who comprise the core of the NFAZ membership are the largest, most technologically sophisticated, most productive and richest peasant producers in Zimbabwe. NFAZ has purposely picked "early adopters" for its extension programs and "opinion leaders" as regional field representatives. They are deprived only in relation to the large-scale commercial producers in the country's former "white highlands". But, because they inhabit low potential and overpopulated land at locations remote from the national agricultural support service infrastructure, this group must nonetheless be classified as a stratum of the poor.

The VADA clientele is a mixed bag. The founding fathers of VADA lead organizations that serve both the rural elite (such as the African Medical Research and Education Foundation which operates the regional flying doctor service) and the rural poor (such as the Kenya Freedom from Hunger Council which provides food relief to the indigent). Indeed, VADA finds it difficult to speak with one voice because of the very heterogeneity of the communities it seeks to serve. For this reason, VADA has been most effective at stimulating policy proposals when it helped launch sectoral working groups among client organizations with particular shared interests. By the end of 1987 the active working groups covered the sectors of health, water supply and small-scale business enterprise.

The case studies suggest a set of fairly obvious propositions about the ways in which clientele composition affects policy clout. First, homogenous social groups with a clustered community of interest help to reinforce a clear definition to program scope. Second, the relatively well-off strata among the poor are likely to be the best organized and most articulate. It is notable in this regard that there is no organization of the landless in Zimbabwe and the absence of their voice helps explain the limited extent of land reform in that country. Finally it is worth noting that organizations representing the rural poor in Africa have tended so far to arise around issues of personal or familial self-interest rather than a broader-based class interest. They seek access to private goods rather than public goods, and around economic services rather than economic assets. To date, the poor have used policy voice to demand inclusion in an ongoing development process rather than advocating a transformation of production and property relations.

Relations with Government

The degree to which national NGOs are able to have policy influence depends greatly on the nature of their formal and informal relations with government. Whether or not an NGO is able to cultivate a sound working relationship with the powers-that-be is one of the best predictors of major and sustainable impact.

Of the three organizations studied here, SDM kept the lowest profile in the eyes of central government. The savings clubs operated without legal registration and SDM's assets were squirreled away under private company legislation to avoid possible State acquisition. The SDM leaders limited their contact with power-holders to the bureaucracy, and within it, to technical functionaries within the field administration. In their greatest tactical error, the SDM executives failed to build support for the savings movement among the top political leaders of the new Zimbabwe government. As a result they were unable to call upon reserves of power when they ran afoul of political appointees in the Department of Cooperative Development. Their main allies within the field ministries were both too junior and too politically marginal. Because SDM had generally chosen to work around rather than with the political elite, they could not call upon protection from above when the chips were down.

The NFAZ enjoys a much more intimate relationship with government. At the outset, the Ministry of Internal Affairs appointed extension staff as office holders in the Association and to this day the Ministry of Agriculture makes contributions to its budget. Indeed, Ministry staff still regard the NFAZ as one of its auxiliary arms for extension purposes. But as the Association obtained African leadership and broadened its functions, so it became able to act more independently. The NFAZ President gives high priority to cultivating ties with politicians at all levels and appears to have been particularly close to successive Ministers of Agriculture. He also uses his board membership on agricultural parastatals to cut through red tape and go directly to top decision-makers. Finally, NFAZ makes a practice of inviting Cabinet Ministers to speak at its annual Congress, and Members of Parliament and ZANU-PF Party Chairmen officiate at NFAZ field days. It is not unusual for several such officials to be present at such events where they have an opportunity both to enunciate government policy and to hear farmers speak directly.

VADA would also have had good access to the inner reaches of power through its Chairman of the Board who sits in the Kenyan Cabinet. But the advantages of such informal ties were compromised by the fact that VADA attempted to occupy territory that the government saw as its own. In 1964, the government established the Kenya National Council of Social Services (KNCSS) to coordinate non-government organizations engaged in social development. The fact that VADA appeared to be setting itself up as a rival to KNCSS did not endear it to the Minister of Culture and Social Services and several of his Cabinet colleagues. The depth of government disapproval was evidenced during 1986 when VADA's staff and funding sources were reportedly investigated by the security police. There were therefore elements within government who took satisfaction when VADA encountered problems of internal management and external funding and, when VADA began to wither away, to see KNCSS to reassert itself.

Taken together, the three cases suggest that alliances with senior political leaders are necessary but not sufficient condition for policy impact. In Africa, where resources are often allocated along personalistic or patronage lines, the most useful ties are informal rather than formal. NGO leaders therefore need to develop is to develop a range of political skills to

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manage an ongoing relationship with State leaders. This requires a capacity to tread a narrow line between confrontation and cooptation and to choose carefully the issues on which to praise or pressure the government.

Relations with Donors

Institution-building is an expensive task which requires access to recurrent budgetary resources for permanent staff, office rental and program operations. National NGOs can usually raise no more than a small proportion of revenues from member dues, user fees and local philanthropy. They therefore fall back on foreign assistance. For reasons that will be spelled out below, an organization's level of dependence on foreign funding may be negatively related to its effectiveness at policy influence.

Compared to most national NGOs in Africa, SDM and NFAZ operate with relatively small amounts of outside assistance. In both cases these organizations were launched and took root before the deluge of foreign aid into Zimbabwe after 1980. Both are also distinctive in requiring financial contributions from members in the form of joining fees and annual subscriptions; savings clubs and farmer groups even impose fines on members who fail to attend meetings. And grassroots savings accounts constitute a unique capital resource for autonomous local-level development. Up to 1985 SDM and NFAZ each had an operating budget for support services that amounted to less than US\$300,000 per year. In the case of NFAZ approximately twenty percent was raised locally. In both cases donor contributions derived from private foundations or church-based philanthropies whose small contributions generally came without "strings" attached.

VADA had a very different financial base and relationship with donors. Its annual budget of \$1.5 million derived entirely from Western donors, with almost 90 percent of that amount from USAID bilateral program to Kenya. Launched as a high-profile national agency, VADA faced high expectations from the outset. USAID regarded VADA as a test case of whether its successful experience of sub-contracting relief and development programs to international NGOs could be replicated with a national NGO in Africa. The VADA leadership saw an opportunity to occupy a powerful position as a broker between the Kenyan NGO community and Kenya's main bilateral donor. Because large amounts of money were involved, the relationship between VADA and USAID came to hinge on financial management concerns at the expense of rural development objectives. And, when USAID finally decided to terminate funding to VADA, the issue took on broader political overtones as a bone of contention between the U.S. and Kenya governments at time, in late 1987, when intergovernmental relations were already strained over human rights concerns.

The VADA experience demonstrates that the ready availability of donor resources can induce formal organizations to emerge in the voluntary sector. But such organizations, and the benefits they deliver, are difficult to sustain in the long-term. They are prone to catch and transmit certain organizational disease, the most common of which are corruption among leaders and a psychology of dependence among members. Instead, organizations tend to attain economic sustainability -- and also policy voice -- to the extent that they build a domestic base of financial support.

This last point is important. The case for self-financing in development programs is usually made in economic terms: that it is cost-effective. But self-financing also offers political benefits. In the first place, it provides local contributors with a mechanism for holding planners and administrators accountable. Second, the existence of a domestic financial base provides the foundation upon which a voice in policy debate can be legitimately asserted. Governments are more likely to heed domestic political representations, if the poor and their allies are pooling their own scarce resources in support of a policy issue. The opposite holds true if the organization's budget derives mainly from foreign aid. Under these circumstances, governments can all too easily discredit critics of official policy with the populist charge that they are dancing to the tune of a foreign piper.

CONCLUSION: WHAT SHOULD DONORS DO?

1. As the 1990s approach, multilateral and bilateral donors show considerable interest in "partnership" arrangements with national NGOs as a means of ensuring that development assistance reaches the rural poor. But big donors and small NGOs make uncomfortable bedfellows by virtue of unbridgeable differences of scale, ethos and capacity. In an asymmetrical power relationship driven by the movement of money, the goals of the dominant agency will invariably displace the goals of the subordinate partner. Moreover, the "absorptive capacity" of national NGOs in Africa is even more limited than that of national governments. Donors already compete with one another to fund a limited array of well-prepared NGO programs and the availability of financial assistance well outstrips the ability of indigenous voluntary institutions to use it productively. Under these circumstances the entry of multilateral and bilateral donors into the local voluntary sector is not necessarily helpful and should be discouraged.

2. If official donors insist on entry, especially into Africa where NGOs are fragile, they should do so indirectly, through third-party intermediaries. For example, international NGOs with a proven record of cooperation with overseas partners should be chartered to administer modest programs of funding for national NGOs. The funding agencies will also have to adopt new modalities of aid delivery to address the requirements of national NGOs. The official donors would do well to learn from the experience of private foundations and church-based philanthropies who have "learnt through doing" how to provide resources in appropriate forms. Some such modalities are: small grants rather than large loans; multi-year program grants rather than short-term project grants; foreign exchange as well as local currencies; coverage of recurrent as well as capital budgets; and flexible procedures for financial reporting.

3. Over time, international NGOs should phase out their involvement in the implementation of rural development programs; instead they should gradually adopt a catalytic role in helping to build indigenous institutional capacity among national NGOs. The provision of official development assistance resources for this purpose would provide an incentive for them to do so. Capacity-building would involve a major effort to upgrade the

management capacity of voluntary sector organizations in Africa. Staff development programs, perhaps leavened within small doses of temporary middle-level technical assistance, would form the core of this effort. Under no circumstances should the current practice of national NGOs to do their own program planning be undermined or replaced by "low-flying missions" by short-term visits of expatriate teams. Special effort will have to be devoted to developing training materials in the field of rural development management (the key issue in which is the reconciliation of participation in decision-making with administrative control) and identifying, in Africa and relevant Third World countries, appropriate training institutions.

4. Official donors and lenders can play a uniquely helpful role in this process by pushing the policy dialogue with host governments further into the realm of governance. National NGOs in Africa have been able to have a degree of policy impact in part because of a climate of economic liberalization encouraged from abroad. In the future, the sustainability of measures recommended in policy dialogue would surely improve if it was informed less by universalistic application of the magic of the market and more by a reflection of the demands of ordinary producers within the host country. And, more generally, foreign governments and donors could explicitly draw host government attention to the contribution that national NGOs make to development. This contribution includes not only increments to economic growth and social welfare but also to the expansion of the civic realm in which citizens make decisions about their own lives. There is plenty of room for the large donors to draw connections between human rights, institutional pluralism and political competition on the one hand and improved socioeconomic well-being on the other. To return to the opening premise of this paper: poverty is a political condition and it is unlikely to be alleviated in the absence of democratization.

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