



# Nongovernmental Organizations and Education in South Africa

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Human Sciences Research Council  
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## Acronyms

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| ABET    | Adult Basic Education and Training                        |
| ANC     | African National Congress                                 |
| CEPD    | Center for Education Policy Development                   |
| CHET    | Center for Higher Education Transformation                |
| CIE     | Catholic Institute of Education                           |
| CSO     | Civil Society Organization                                |
| DET     | Department of Education and Training                      |
| DFID    | British Department for International Development          |
| DOE     | Department of Education                                   |
| EPU     | Education Policy Unit                                     |
| EU      | European Union  |
| GEAR    | Growth, Employment, and Redistribution strategy           |
| GNU     | Government of National Unity                              |
| HSRC    | Human Sciences Research Council                           |
| IDT     | Independent Development Trust                             |
| IEB     | Independent Examinations Board                            |
| ITEC    | Institute of Training and Education for Capacity-building |
| JEP     | Joint Enrichment Project                                  |
| JET     | Joint Education Trust                                     |
| NDA     | National Development Agency                               |
| NGO     | Nongovernmental Organization                              |
| NPO     | Nonprofit Organization                                    |
| PSI     | Private Sector Initiative                                 |
| RDP     | Reconstruction and Development Program                    |
| SACHED  | South African Committee for Higher Education Development  |
| SADC    | Southern African Development Community                    |
| SANGOCO | South African National NGO Coalition                      |
| TNDT    | Transitional National Development Trust                   |
| UDF     | United Democratic Front                                   |
| UF      | Urban Foundation  |
| UN      | United Nations  |
| USAID   | United States Agency for International Development        |

## 1. Background and Methodology

### Objectives of the Study

This study of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and education in South Africa is intended to provide background information and ideas on the role of NGOs in South African education to government, donors, and other interested parties.

In particular, the study examines the changing role of educational NGOs in relation to government, donors, commercialization and service provision, and advocacy. The study ends with some reflections on lessons learned.

### Methodology

When we commenced this project, we had little idea of the scale of the educational NGO sector in South Africa. It rapidly became clear, however, that it is a large, changing, and extremely diverse area. The nature of the project that we had undertaken in terms of funding and time meant that there could be no question of a comprehensive or even sample survey of the area. In terms of generalization, we soon realized that we would have to rely on the work of others. Indeed, previous surveys had been attempted, albeit of the sector as a whole rather than of educational NGOs specifically, and had fallen short in various ways. However, the work of Swilling and Russell, the product of several year's labor, has recently been published (Swilling and Russell, 2002). This is the best general survey of the area available at present, from which we have been able to extract material about educational NGOs. We have relied on this study for a broad picture of educational NGOs in this country.

Otherwise, our methodology was based on surveys of published work, "grey" material of one sort and another, electronic information, and above all, interviews with selected individuals from educational NGOs, government, and other relevant bodies. We chose our interviewees with a view to obtaining as representative a spread as possible of educational NGOs, and also with an eye to obtaining views that we knew from other sources would be stimulating and helpful. We were not disappointed. This study, then, is overwhelmingly qualitative in approach.

This study is set within the context of the changing South African society since the 1980s. We would argue that though such an approach, emphasizing alteration, development, and sometimes conflict over time, is crucial in every context, it is particularly so in South Africa, where profound political, social, and economic change has characterized the society over many years. It would be wrong to imply that South Africa is unique or that tendencies that operate elsewhere do not do so in this country also. Indeed, the field of NGOs worldwide interacts in some ways similar to the field in South Africa. Nevertheless, it is impossible to read off the meaning of South African NGOs from some generalized template, and we believe strongly that the contemporary situation can only be understood in relation to the history that we spend some space considering.

We hope that this is also a story that will be enjoyable to read. South African English, the *lingua franca* of the country, is rich and vigorous. The people we interviewed shared this vigor to the full. We hope we have captured this quality.

This study is part of a series to examine the roles of NGOs in education across Africa funded by the United States Agency for International Development's Africa Bureau through the Support for Analysis and Research in Africa project. Dr. Yolande Miller-Grandvaux coordinated the studies and can be contacted for more information at [ymliller-grandvaux@usaid.gov](mailto:ymliller-grandvaux@usaid.gov) or (202) 712-5207.

## **2. The Development of NGOs in South Africa, Especially in Education**

### **Terminology**

This research is framed in terms of “nongovernmental organizations.” There has been much debate on how to refer to such organizations in South Africa as elsewhere and terminology is confusing and haphazard. Some argue that “nonprofit organizations” is a more apt overall phrase. Many of the smaller South African NGOs are more correctly described as “community based organizations.” In the South African context, it may be that the term “NGO” carries, or carried, a political charge in that it highlighted the separateness of these organizations from and even their opposition to government. In this study, to align it with its companion studies of other African countries, the organizations will be referred to as NGOs, with the proviso that it is a general term without much analytical precision. The context should indicate the nature of the bodies under discussion.

### **Some Historical Background**

NGOs have a long history in South Africa. The longstanding involvement of various Christian churches in education, going back to the origins of European settlement in terms of the white population and to the middle of the 18th century in other communities, could be defined as NGO activity in education, though terminologically this is an anachronism. Churches and missions, which operated apart from and sometimes in collaboration with the governments of the time, did not aspire to make a profit and were the first educational NGOs. For many years they played a crucial and often ambiguous role, educating Africans and providing the tools for better understanding of the world while themselves contributing to the transformation and sometimes shattering of indigenous cultures and societies. In the sphere of education, churches cooperated with governments but sometimes clashed with them when they considered they were interfering excessively in their work. Through the many political, economic, and social transformations of South African history, the work of churches in education continued.

In many African countries, and indeed in Europe, educational development in the 20th century was characterized by the shrinking of the sphere of religious and mission education and the growth of state involvement. This was true of the colonial state, and in general these tendencies continued after independence. However, African states were less robust than they seemed. In the euphoria of independence, post-colonial states seemed at first to be able to achieve a great deal, but in fact their fragility, due to a variety of factors including vulnerable economies often based on a single primary product, low levels of educational development, and a frequently authoritarian political ethos, became rapidly apparent. Where there was not simply disintegration of governmental structures, spaces quickly opened that far-from-robust states could not fill. This, in an ironic twist, gave opportunities for other institutions like NGOs.

In South Africa, however, the state was far more powerful than in most African countries. With the coming to power of the National Party in 1949, relations between churches and government took on a harder edge, and education like other spheres was forced into the service of a narrow ethnic nationalism. The fundamental instrument in this program was the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which was based on the conception of separate educational systems and curriculum content for different races. It was also based on a view of education that emphasized the state as the ultimate provider of education. In many countries this view was perceived as progressive, with private and especially church education seen as retrograde and sometimes elitist. In South Africa, however, because of the particular racial and political context, liberals, and radicals tended to view the takeover of education at all levels as an attack on what services there were for the black population.

Thus, in the apartheid era and particularly from the 1970s a new generation of NGOs began to emerge, not usually religious in origin generally in an implicitly or explicitly oppositional stance to the government of the time. They channeled dissenting voices where conventional politics rarely appeared to offer opportunities to express such dissent, joining those already in existence like the South African Institute of Race Relations, and to the best of their ability attempted to compensate for the many failures of the state in providing education for all South Africans.

South Africa had other characteristics that gave a particular profile to this increasingly vigorous NGO sector. Unlike most other African states, it had resources of many kinds and the expertise and capital to exploit them. At a time when many foreign funders were reluctant to have anything to do with South Africa, it was possible to mobilize resources from within the country. There was a large middle-class, which, while predominantly white and often racist, was complex enough to contain liberal and dissenting elements whose organizational and financial skills could be utilized. In spite of the numerous political and social barriers to achievement, there were substantial numbers of educated black South Africans whose skills were often also available to the sector.

Importantly, South Africa retained elements of western-style democracy, although within the context of a society organized as a racial hierarchy. This did not include the majority of the population, but there was sufficient remaining of the rule of law and of freedom of association, in the midst of overall oppression, to provide spaces where NGOs could work, albeit with difficulty. This was true although these freedoms, even for the privileged white population, were constantly menaced and encroached upon. There is an important contrast to be drawn here with the many weak but tyrannical post-colonial states of the rest of Africa. These took over directly the methods and infrastructure of colonialism, often unmediated even by the residual and embattled freedoms that had survived the onslaught of the apartheid state in South Africa.

Thus, the South African state, in ways parallel to the other advanced or relatively advanced industrial countries, expanded basic education to the mass of the population, or at least to the urban part of it, under the rubric of Bantu Education. The puppet governments of the various black homelands did the same in these displaced urban slums. However, such education was at the same time challenged perhaps in more fundamental ways than in many other states at comparable levels of social and economic development. The overall critique of apartheid presented the opportunity to interrogate the content and organization of the educational system in a manner that might otherwise have been less clearly articulated.

The combination of social complexity, relative wealth, the remaining “liberal” elements in the South African polity, and the vigorous forces of opposition opened a window to NGOs in education and other areas. Because the country was increasingly isolated internationally in the political and cultural spheres, much of the energy in the NGO area was generated at home. Even where overseas donors played a major role (generally private bodies and not states, most of which at least verbally shunned South Africa until political change began to appear possible in the 1980s) they tended to take a less forcefully formative approach towards the NGOs they funded than elsewhere, probably in the belief that the South African liberation struggle and associated cultural and educational initiatives should be primarily a South African concern. Perhaps only in Chile under the colonels was there a similar situation, or in South Africa’s neighbors Namibia and Zimbabwe (King, 1999). This led to a strong, politically oriented, and generally oppositional NGO sector in South Africa before 1994.

## **The Political Context**

The decisive political voice in contemporary South Africa is the African National Congress (ANC). However, the ANC is a complex organization with many influences feeding into its present structure. After the banning of the up-to-then legal movements such as the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress in 1960, the ANC began the long and difficult process of regrouping underground both within the country and in exile. Until 1976, when the Soweto uprising of that year transformed the political situation in the country and in exile, the movement clung on precariously. Revived by the exodus of young militants in 1976 and supported increasingly by some external backers, especially the Eastern Bloc countries and by the Scandinavian social democracies, the ANC in exile became an increasingly well-structured and formidable liberation movement between 1976 and 1990.

An important though by no means decisive component of the movement in exile was the South African Communist Party, which tended to take an orthodox pro-Moscow line in terms of the world communism of the 1980s. It can be argued that this tendency in the ANC alliance, with its centralizing, state-oriented philosophy, was inimical to the more libertarian, decentralizing environment within which NGOs tend to flourish. Educationally speaking, a world-wide network of South African educationalists opposed to the regime in power contributed to the development of the ANC's policy in this sphere. In terms of practical implementation, the movement founded and ran the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Tanzania where young exiles and the children of the older generation of exiles were educated. This school was the centerpiece of the large exile community in Mazimbu, Tanzania, and embodied ANC educational practice in exile.

Within South Africa, the later 1970s and 1980s were periods of intense and complex social and political upheaval. Since its leaders were jailed or in exile, the ANC was for many a somewhat shadowy symbol rather than a palpable political presence. Other tendencies, such as the Black Consciousness movement most famously represented by Steve Biko, had arisen. Above all, initiatives in many spheres at many different levels of organization had come into existence, from the local to the national, diverse but all having in common emphatic dissent from the established racially-based paradigm. Whether political, economic, cultural, or educational in orientation, these bodies were obliged by the nature of the South African political and social establishment to overtly or implicitly challenge the context in which they found themselves. There was very little room for "working within the system" in the South Africa of the 1980s.

In terms of political structures, large numbers of these bodies came together in 1983 in the United Democratic Front (UDF), banned in 1988 but reemerging the following year as the Mass Democratic Movement (Seekings, 2000; van Kessel, 2000; Houston, 1999). This alliance was and still is often seen, both from the perspectives of those opposed to it and from that of the present ANC-led regime in South Africa, as the Trojan Horse of the ANC. This is only partly true. However, seen in another way, the UDF was a kind of loose coalition of NGOs and other organizations forced into overt politicization and militancy by the obduracy of the environment within which it was obliged to operate. Not all NGOs were attached to the UDF, but those that were represented a critical voice that spoke to a greater or lesser degree for many other individuals and organizations in the sector.

Important elements of the NGO sector, in short, were formed and grew in a posture of radical opposition to government. This was both its strength and its vulnerability when it came to face the political changes of the 1990s. The liberation credentials of the sector were clear, but the transition from opposition to cooperation was difficult. In addition, the dominant ANC component of the new government, which itself was, *inter alia*, a coalition of the exile and internal wings of the movement, also inherited a range of attitudes to the nongovernmental sector.



Some prominent figures had grown politically in the UDF; others came from the exile wing of the ANC, whose links with the NGO sector were more tenuous, though they did tend to have associations with NGOs worldwide.

Within this overall picture, education has a special significance. The UDF, with the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the National Education Crisis Committee, set up various educational organizations that became important coordinators of resistance in the mid- to late-1980s. The most innovative South African educational thinking also took place outside the framework of the official educational system and virtually never intersected with it. Rarely did anything but the most reactionary educational ideas find expression within the structures of the official educational system, especially in those parts of the system—the Department of Education and Training (DET) in “South Africa” proper and the various homeland departments of education—devoted to black education. The work of Ken Hartshorne and aspects of the educational system of the Bophupatswana homeland are exceptional in this regard (see, for instance, Hartshorne, 1992; Molokoe, 2000). Innovative educational thinking and practice took place in exile (Morrow, Maaba and Pulumani, 2002), at the liberal English-speaking universities, and at some independent schools. Many of these were expensive and elitist, floating above the elemental conflicts of mass education on a sea of money, but some, especially the Catholic schools, struggled to maintain themselves in a more inclusive way in the context of official hostility and financial difficulty.

Above all, South African educational issues were confronted in theory and practice through a range of educationally-oriented NGOs. These NGOs were in a complex relationship to the society around them, opposed with varying degrees of emphasis to the government of the day, mostly run by liberal or radical white South Africans with black colleagues often in lower rungs of the organizations and funded by a variety of domestic and international donors.

In many respects, the modern phase of the South African revolution stemmed from the revolt against the educational dispensation created by the National Party government. The key documents here are a series of educational acts, most notably the Bantu Education Act of 1953, upon the basis of which was constructed a racially-divided education system, with different curricula considered “appropriate” for different races and an insistent emphasis on white supremacy and cultural difference. It should be noted, however, that this was also the basis for mass black education, not in some ways so different from the mass education of the working classes of the industrializing countries of Europe at an earlier period, however inferior that education might have been (Hyslop, 1999). Nemesis overtook the system in that it proved impossible to shunt all black education into the isolated rural homelands, and the alienated urban youth in DET schools precipitated the revolts that shook the system in 1976, and that continued thereafter.

The revolt against Bantu Education remained at the heart of the South African struggle for liberation, providing the young militants who contributed to making the townships ungovernable. This struggle, while defying an intolerable educational dispensation, also involved profound shocks to the very idea of a coherent education system. In response to the call for “No Education Before Liberation,” various political actors and especially educational NGOs propounded the concept of “People’s Education,” arguing that advantage should be taken of whatever limited good could be wrung out of the system. Civil society should add as many progressive elements to this as it could, thus ameliorating a situation where it appeared that whole generations of young black people might emerge from the political conflict with hardly any education at all.

Thus, at the beginning of the 1990s there was a vigorous liberation movement that to some extent was a coalition of NGOs and which contained a domestic wing strongly entrenched in the NGO sector. The movement also had a returning external wing less embedded in this sector, an important engagement with education by the liberation movement as a whole, and an educational NGO sector anxious to turn towards the huge task of educational reconstruction but was, to a considerable extent, trapped in an oppositional mode. This was a complex and ambiguous inheritance. We will now see how this inheritance influenced the course of events in the 1990s and into the new century.

### **The Early 1990s**

Majority rule came not by armed revolution but in the unexpected to many form of negotiations between the liberation movements and representatives of the old regime in the transitional period from 1990 to 1994, with all the bargaining and concessions that this involved. The new Government of National Unity (GNU) that emerged in 1994 thus incorporated elements of the ANC and the old regime, which was undoubtedly prone to suspicions of the NGO sector. The ANC, as well as having to some extent an inheritance of state-oriented centralism from its Communist Party partners and now defunct East European supporters, was trying also to assert itself in the governmental context into which it had been thrust so rapidly. It also, with some reason, considered itself the embodiment of many decades of struggle against apartheid.

Thus, surprisingly at first sight, the struggle against apartheid was the precursor to an attempt to centralize the type of activities typically carried out by NGOs and to integrate them in a united effort embodied in the state's Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP). This had two aspects: firstly, the relationship with funders, who were now expected by the new government and were themselves by and large quite willing to divert their resources to the state so as to ensure that its developmental aims were given priority; and secondly, the relationship with NGOs, which were meant to align themselves with and even subsume themselves in the state's program. Clearly this was not a simple process, and there were competing tendencies within government that have in more recent times emerged in less centralizing development philosophies and in a greater emphasis on the "free market" with implications for NGOs.

Like the world at large, South Africa has in recent years experienced the effects of a renewed global emphasis on competition and the free movement of capital though not labor. In some ways this ran counter to the statist philosophy outlined above. This might be expected to have boosted the role of NGOs that are, after all, in some senses and cases, relatively free agents in the social structure, capable of adapting fairly easily to conditions of competition and social and economic deregulation. To some extent this has been the case. However, the emphasis on value-for-money, accountability, and the necessity for objective and measurable outcomes did not always sit well with some of the inheritances of South African NGOs. In the words of one commentator writing in 1995 arguing for the importance of preemptive planning, many South African educational NGOs tended to have "high legitimacy, but low productivity" (Ward, 1995: 3). In particular, strategies developed for the volatile socio-political environment of the 1980s and early 1990s, amounting at their extreme to the "struggle accounting" that could occasionally be a euphemism for diverting donor funds for political and sometimes personal purposes, ran counter to this increased emphasis on accountability and financial probity.

There was a perhaps more fundamental dynamic at work also. It was difficult for NGOs to think themselves out of the apartheid environment from which they had grown and against which they inevitably defined themselves. As Melissa King and Owen van den Berg wrote in the midst of these changes in 1992 in the context of the Independent Examinations Board (IEB), an NGO set up to provide alternatives to the state's assessment system, "[i]n a sense the organization, like

many others, had been born in opposition to apartheid and yet protected by it, secure in its task and in the expectation of its clients: the challenge of the future was likely to set a quite different agenda” (King and van den Berg, 1992: 196). Or after 1994, as Greenstein and others put it, “the task of abolishing the apartheid system, which served to unify civil society organizations in their confrontation with the state, had been accomplished and was replaced by a host of less focussed, disparate, and sometimes contradictory visions of democracy, reconstruction, development, as well as constructive criticism” (Greenstein *et al.*, quoted in Cawthra *et al.*, 2000: 43).

However, the situation should not be oversimplified. Institutional survival and educational aspirations interacted in complex ways. Educational theories and practices that emphasized quantifiable performance outcomes in all fields of education and training accompanied and were to some extent embedded in the rationalizing, market-oriented discourse that increasingly dominated from the early 1990s in South Africa and elsewhere. Funding now tended predominantly to follow this new alignment. Writing in the context of a detailed study of one youth development NGO, the Joint Enrichment Project (JEP), Margaret Perrow describes how the transformation in South Africa

heightened the tensions between the “human-capital” perspectives of the government spenders and the more holistic views of some youth development NGOs that seek their financial support. In the 1980s, South African NGOs like the JEP justified their existence to public and private funding agencies in terms of their contribution to the anti-apartheid liberation struggle. However, in the newly democratic South Africa ... youth-development programs like the JEP were compelled to justify their existence to public and private funding agencies in terms of their contribution to the country’s supply of “human capital,” as part of the transition to a global, free-market economy (Perrow, 2002: 4-5).

Educational NGOs differed, ranging from those that had been formed to serve the white community, through those coming from a broadly liberal standpoint that was critical of the regime but seeking opportunities to work within the interstices of South African society as it existed at the time, to those formed in a mold of outright opposition to the apartheid regime. It might be said that tension between the need for fundraising and the commitment to change is an integral part of the NGO world, standing as it is at the intersection of the state, the market, and civil society.

Assisting the poor to be a successful part of the market economy, or trying in some way to provide alternatives, is an abiding dilemma. In the South African context this dilemma was heightened by the polarization generated by apartheid, where the wish to be rid of an intolerable regime defined on exclusive racial principles could often be elided with aspirations for some form of new society based on principles of economic and social egalitarianism.

### **Conclusion: Into the Contemporary Period**

With the exception of the small number overtly aligned with the previous establishment, NGOs had to now rapidly adjust to the unexpected situation where they were considerably less privileged than they had once supposed would be the case in the aftermath of majority rule. They were presented with a number of possibilities that sometimes became imperatives. They could continue to seek nongovernmental funding and attempt to survive in the complex environment of post-1994 South Africa independently or semi-independently from government. They could attempt to integrate themselves more closely with government initiatives, becoming implementers of official policies or even subservient to government. They could become consultancies, thus losing the service ethos characteristic of NGOs and becoming little different from commercial

businesses, whatever the legal structure of the organizations. Or they could cease operations, thereby tacitly acknowledging that government now adequately represented the aims for which they had been striving.

For some NGOs it was not a question of options or possibilities but rather of inevitabilities. In the period after 1994, with the apparent normalization of South African society and the accompanying diminution of funding from international agencies and local corporate sources, there was a mass extinction of NGOs. This was the complex and often difficult situation that South African educational NGOs faced in the mid-1990s.

### 3. Educational NGOs in South Africa: An Overall Perspective

#### Size and Shape of the Sector

Educational NGOs in South Africa have developed in large numbers over a considerable period of time. They have operated at various levels and with various degrees of cooperation, resistance, or service to different governments. While there has been more organizational stability in the total NGO area than has sometimes been assumed, educational NGOs have come into and gone out of existence over the years. What is the current scale of the sector?

There have been various studies over the years that have attempted to answer this question. However, we are fortunately able to benefit from the recent publication of the most authoritative study of the area, by Mark Swilling and Bev Russell, *The Size and Scope of the Nonprofit Sector in South Africa* (2002). This research, carried out under the aegis of the Johns Hopkins University Institute for Policy Studies Center for Civil Society Studies and the Graduate School of Public and Development of the University of the Witwatersrand over five years, attempted to estimate the size and importance of the not-for-profit sector in South Africa. Most of this section of the report, including the tables, is based on Swilling and Russell's findings. In referring to it, the present tense will be used, though it should be remembered that data are for 1999 except for financial details, which are for 1998.

The dimensions of the educational NGO sector should be seen against those of the sector as a whole. Swilling and Russell, who use the phrase nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in their study, estimate that there are 98,920 NPOs in South Africa, of which 53 percent are less formalized, community-based organizations working at local level, mostly "voluntary associations." They indicate that this is an industry that accounted for 1.2 percent of South African gross domestic product in 1998. The sector as a whole uses the equivalent of 645,316 fulltime workers. Just over half of these are in paid employment; the rest are volunteers. In total this comprises 7.6 percent of the total nonagricultural workforce and 9 percent of the formal nonagricultural workforce. The sector is a larger employer than, for instance, the mining industry. This makes the South African not-for-profit sector proportionally larger than the average for the 28 countries studied by the Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies in its series of large-scale international studies, of which the study by Swilling and Russell is one (see Salamon *et al.*; 1999, updated in Institute for Policy Studies, 2002).

The Johns Hopkins studies break down NPOs into 11 categories, of which "Education and Research" is one. There are 5,691 NPOs in this category in South Africa—which is 5.8 percent of all NPOs—4,667 of them operating in elementary, primary, and secondary education, none in higher education, and 1,024 in adult and continuing education. Thus the incorporation of "research" with education does not appear to distort the results from an educational point of view. It should be noted that there are many other NPOs in South Africa with a para-educational role not included here. The categories of "public health and wellness education," encompassing 1,038 organizations, and "job training programs" with 3,790, are examples.

The methodology of the report also means that small categories, such as NGOs working in higher education, may be overlooked. This applies, for instance, to the Center for Higher Education Transformation (CHET), which has recently ceased operations. While it was in existence, CHET received significant donations from foundations. Some other NGOs, like the Center for Education Policy Development (CEPD) and the Education Policy Unit (EPU) at the University of the Western Cape, also deal with higher education. There are various other categories also, such as

voter education, consumer education, health education, and legal and human rights education that are relevant to this area.

South African NPOs are for the most part established and stable, having an average age of 19 years. However, those in education and research are amongst those established the most recently, with an average life of eight years. Of existing educational NPOs, 142 go back to before 1976, 1,901 have their origins in the period 1976 to 1993, and 3,648 postdate 1994. They employ 23,962 fulltime employees, 1,629 part-timers, and the equivalent of 5,548 volunteers. Thus this sector utilizes a greater proportion of full-timers than most.

In terms of the overall profile of the South African economy and society, NPOs tend to utilize more women, more black people in general, and more black women in particular than other sectors. Black South Africans are preponderant at every level, including the managerial. The role of women is particularly marked in educational NPOs. These characteristics are indicated below:

| <b>Percent Managerial</b> |          |          |          | <b>Percent Professional and Technical</b> |          |          |          | <b>Percent Support and Administration</b> |          |          |          | <b>Percent Blue Collar</b> |          |          |          |
|---------------------------|----------|----------|----------|---|----------|----------|----------|---|----------|----------|----------|----------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
| <b>M</b>                  | <b>F</b> | <b>B</b> | <b>W</b> | <b>M</b>                                  | <b>F</b> | <b>B</b> | <b>W</b> | <b>M</b>                                  | <b>F</b> | <b>B</b> | <b>W</b> | <b>M</b>                   | <b>F</b> | <b>B</b> | <b>W</b> |
| 15                        | 85       | 88       | 12       | 14  | 86       | 88       | 12       | 12  | 88       | 100      | -        | 6                          | 93       | 42       | 58       |

However, as compared to the other 28 countries in the Johns Hopkins studies, a considerably smaller proportion of the South African NPO workforce (6 percent) is employed in education than the 22 percent average overall.

Forty-two percent of the total income of R14 billion of South African NGOs is received from government. Those receiving government funds are, for the most part, well-developed, formal NPOs in urban working class and middle class communities. Private sector funding, if donations from nongovernmental international aid is included, amounts to nearly R3.5 billion, which, at 25 percent of total funding, is one of the highest proportions of any of the 28 surveyed countries. This reflects the high level of funding from the corporate sector. Of this private sector funding, most went to health (R634 million) and development and housing (R585 million).

However, education and research was also a large beneficiary of private sector funding at R490 million. In fact, 60 percent of the income of the education and research sector came from private sector donors. The full range of revenues received by education and research NPOs follows, in millions of rand:

|                     |                       |            |
|---------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| <b>Private</b>      | Fees, Sales, Dues     | 286        |
|                     | Investment Income     | 21         |
|                     | Private Sector Donors | 490        |
| <b>Government</b>   | Grants and Contracts  | 17         |
| <b>Total Income</b> |                       | <b>815</b> |

This seems a small proportion from government grants and contracts, and, anecdotally, indications are that this proportion is expanding considerably in recent years.

### **Legal and Taxation Framework**

The overall legal framework within which South African NGOs operate is generally agreed to have improved over recent years. The Nonprofit Organizations Act of 1997 provided “for an environment in which nonprofit organizations can flourish ... [and for] ... an administrative and regulatory framework within which nonprofit organizations can conduct their affairs” (*Government Gazette*, 18487, 1997: 2). The act allows for self-regulation and accountability and the right, whether registered or not, to raise funds. It also provides for voluntary registration, the incentive to do so being that the commitment to a set of basic standards required by registration will increase public confidence in the particular NGO and in the sector as a whole.

In terms of taxation, the position of NGOs has also improved since the Taxation Laws Amendment Act of 2000. By this act, the categories of voluntary bodies qualifying for tax exemption were extended, and the Minister of Finance has discretion to further extend them. He has done this in response to pressure from NGOs and donors. Also, tax exemption on donations was extended and the amounts liable for exemption were raised. This previously only applied to educational institutions and educational funds, the distinction between which has also now been abolished. In the most limited sense, it could be said that the previously privileged position of specifically educational NGOs has been taken away, but more importantly, the voluntary sector as a whole has been assisted. A fuller discussion of the legal and taxation position of NGOs can be found in Cawthra, Kraak, and Maepa, 2000, Chapter 4.

#### **4. Government, NGOs, and Education**

##### **Getting into their Stride: The Early Days of the Government of National Unity and Educational NGOs**

As has been seen, the early 1990s marked a major change in the environment in which NGOs operated. The socio-economic framework launched by the ANC-led Government of National Unity was the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), as previously noted. In some ways this represented the centralizing socialist tendency that was one aspect of the ANC's political inheritance. In another sense, at this early stage in majority rule it represented the optimistic view, soon to be disproved, that government had the ability and capacity to manage and change great swathes of the social landscape.

In many ways the next few years demonstrated the limitations of what was possible through state action. The government learned fast, and soon, though the RDP was never formally abandoned, the department driving it was disbanded and it became more a set of aspirations than an actual program. It was replaced by the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution strategy (GEAR), based on a market-oriented philosophy in tune with predominant thinking and practice in the contemporary western world. However, in its dealings with the NGO sphere, the aspiration remained to have as much donor funding as possible channeled through the government, even if in operational terms the government now began to see itself as utilizing NGOs and cooperating with them rather than directly managing them.

The period when government-initiated policy led to the cutting off of much funding to the NGO sector lasted relatively briefly. However, it did have devastating effects on many of them. The extinction of many educational NGOs in the 1990s probably represented the natural demise of some that had really lost their role and which appeared not to have had the intellectual and managerial flexibility to adapt. These would probably never have flourished in the new environment in any circumstances. However, it also led to the death of some that arguably could have contributed usefully in the new dispensation, such as the Science Education Project, and the PROMAT Trust, founded in 1982 to run centers offering good-quality professional development and support to black teachers in secondary and tertiary institutions. These early days were traumatic for educational NGOs.

However, while the situation remains fluid, a modicum of stability seems now to have been achieved. NGOs work at national and regional levels with government on a range of educational concerns, from early childhood education, through adult basic education and training (ABET) and literacy, to special needs and many other areas. In the core area of the formal schools system they are less prominent, though they are present in teacher and materials development and around the periphery working on drug abuse, school safety, and the like. For example, Gun-Free South Africa, an NGO working against the availability of weapons, is active in schools. Though there is no overall forum for interaction between government and educational NGOs, there are boards for literacy, further education and training, and other areas where there are opportunities for interaction. Indeed, some in government feel that NGOs often fail to make as much use of such fora as they might.

NGOs interact with the Department of Education (DOE), other departments that touch on education directly and indirectly, and also with provincial departments in a wide variety of projects. These partnerships can be with NGOs in many fields—development, public policy, public finance, HIV/AIDS, and so on—but the bulk are with organizations whose scope is clearly educational. Apart from such partnerships, government departments are also approached by



NGOs who wish to obtain information, statistical or otherwise, for their work and research. Indirectly, officials at departments of education read material produced by NGOs and participate in seminars that they host and vice-versa.

Though the governance of education has been simplified and rationalized in South Africa as compared with the period before 1994, it is still a relatively complex system. The national DOE under parliament determines educational policy matters and sets the context within which the system of the country as a whole is administered. Higher education is also a national responsibility. There are various bodies such as the South African Qualifications Authority and the Commission on Higher Education that also serve the system nationally. However, state education is actually implemented, administered, and monitored at the level of the nine provinces. These provinces replaced the four provinces of the old South Africa. The poorest of them incorporate the homelands that were the apartheid government's version of the earlier "native reserves" into which most of the rural part of the black population was penned.

### **Government, NGOs, and Donors**

In the context of an Africa-wide study, it should be said that the domestically-generated resources available to the Government of South Africa are far greater than are those available to other African countries. The stringent economic policies that have been implemented in South Africa are not due to intolerable and unmanageable external debt and consequent structural adjustment demands from international financial bodies, but are rather the product of a deliberate implementation of what the government considers a prudent fiscal and financial policy. This places the country in a different and stronger relationship to external donors and NGOs than is often the case elsewhere. The problem that often confronts the government, in education as in other spheres, is not so much an absolute lack of resources as in deploying the administrative competencies to spend available money constructively and judiciously.

The funding relationship between donors, government, and NGOs is many-sided and complex. Each influence the other, but each also operates in its own institutional framework. Clearly donors intersect with government in many spheres apart from the educational, and in education the vehicle for the utilization of donor aid is by no means always the NGO sector (see Ngeleza, Chabane, and Dlamani, 2000). Nevertheless, the government-donor-NGO nexus is an interesting and sometimes problematic one with its own particular characteristics.

Bobby Soobrayan, deputy director general in charge of Planning and Monitoring in the national DOE, argues that from a governmental point of view, South Africa is fortunate in that in general it has the capacity to manage the donor relationship without allowing the agendas of donors—or of service providers—to dominate the relationship. He contrasts this with the position in many African countries, where overseas trips and *per diems* in a hard currency may be almost irresistible lures to members of an impoverished bureaucracy, thereby distorting the relationship with questions of personal interest. Where aims and criteria are clear, where such blandishments can be resisted because officials are adequately paid, and when government possesses strong political and negotiating skills, then he feels it is possible to manage such vested interests.

However, donor funding can seem a distraction and even an annoyance to a government attempting to manage its own domestic budget constructively. The attraction of donor-funds is that they seem flexible and discretionary, and can be "parked" with an organization like the Joint Education Trust (JET) or the Center for Education Policy Development (CEPD) in the case of education, ready to be utilized in a range of ways. However, the reality is often different. Duncan Hindle, the deputy director general in charge of General Education and Training, cites the example of a large British grant that the donors attempted to make conditional on a proportion of

it going to a certain NGO. To the DOE, this was unacceptable. “They’re trying to say, we’ll only fund government, but we’ll tell government who they must fund, and that for us can’t work.” At the time of writing, this particular difficulty had not been resolved, but it indicates the extent to which relative South African economic strength gives the country leverage to resist what some might consider unacceptable external conditions. On the other hand, it could also be seen as illustrating the degree of centralized control that government exerts over both NGOs and donors.

Hindle also notes the complexity of donor funding, arguing that government money is easier to use and is available in far larger amounts than donor funding, which looks attractive but can often involve complex reporting procedures and other conditions that are untenable. He gives the example of a generous World Bank funding proposal for R8 million that had been mooted to the DOE, noting however, that this only amounted to an individual province’s daily expenditure on education. In a comment that is interesting in relation to the idea that money tends to go to government rather than to NGOs, he argues that rather than entangling the official system in what is essentially a distraction, it might be preferable for such amounts to go to an NGO that could make good use of it, for instance for research from which the DOE would be glad to benefit.

Donor funding, then, can be a distraction from the point of view of government. Unlike in many smaller, poorer African states, it is a small proportion of total expenditure. But it does tend to give leverage, especially if it is discretionary funding, and can lead to spending a lot of time on managing a relatively small amount of money rather than concentrating on spending the much larger sums that is the obligation of the government to use constructively. “We have ... grants, which are unspent, of hundreds of millions of rands, and here we’re scrapping over two or three million for a smaller agency, and spending an enormous amount of time talking to them, quarterly meetings, quarterly reports, all of those kind of things. Absolutely a waste of time.”

The point is there seems to be no principled objection from government to donor funds being directed towards educational NGOs. In fact, they are acknowledged to be in a better position in some contexts to spend them usefully than is government. As Hindle says, “Government does certain things, and certain funds are useful for that. NGOs do different things, and I’d worry if now the notion is that money comes to government to go to NGOs. If that was the intention, then my preference would certainly be to go straight to the NGOs.”

### **The State as a Funder of NGOs**

Governmental grants to NGOs may be directed through parastatal funding organizations, or through ministries and departments at national or local levels. Such direct funding is through tenders for particular tasks that NGOs and other appropriate organizations can apply or longer-term partnerships between government and NGOs into which program funding is channeled. The national and provincial DOEs are amongst the main ministries working in this way.

NGOs sometimes express discontent about the way in which the tendering process impacts on them. Government feels that training sessions by the Tender Board, briefing sessions for large tenders, and a constant attempt to simplify the process do not put NGOs at any particular disadvantage. At least some educational NGOs however feel that they are disadvantaged in a very fundamental way, in that the criteria for black empowerment written into tender documents are oriented towards companies rather than not-for-profit institutions. NGOs are generally far “blacker” than commercial companies, and tender documents habitually call for racial equity and the recognition and promotion of previously disadvantaged groups, and indeed are weighted so as to give some preference to such groups. Yet because they are not structured so as to have black shareholders, this aspect is discounted in their applications. This, according to Andrew Miller of

Project Literacy, reveals the contrast between the rhetoric favoring civil society and actual practice as revealed in tenders. This is a factor pushing NGOs towards a more commercial orientation in a formal legal sense.

There have been several phases in the direct granting of funds to NGOs from government since 1990. In line with its attempt at political and social reorientation, in 1990 the then government established the Independent Development Trust (IDT) that disbursed funds for development in education, housing, job creation, health, and rural development. The organization survived the transition of 1994, but in 1997 was brought more fully under the control of the state and became a vehicle for government development projects rather than a grant making body. Remaining IDT funds were to be transferred to the National Development Agency (NDA). Between 1990 and 1997 the IDT disbursed R2.7 billion to 8,800 projects.

Since the NDA was not in fact in place, there was a need for an organization to bridge the gap with the IDT in its earlier grant-making form. This was the Transitional National Development Trust (TNDDT), set up by government in collaboration with the Kagiso Trust, a European Union-supported grant-making organization, and the IDT. Commencement of operations was delayed by internal problems, and it was relatively poorly funded, so that it disbursed most of its funds between the start of operations in April 1997 and early 1998. The TNDDT slowed though did not stop the casualty-rate amongst NGOs, but it did support important development areas and in the process gave some relief to the sector.

Education was by a considerable margin the main beneficiary of TNDDT grants, receiving R58,484,815 out of total disbursements of R120,596,204. However funding applications—many of which would no doubt have been judged inadequate or ineligible for one reason or another—were many times in excess of what was available. Given the delays in the launch of the NDA, the Ministry of Finance was persuaded in 1998 to make available to the TNDDT, which was now being wound up, the R50 million put aside for the NDA in the 1998-99 budget as a way of bridging the gap before the institution of the new body. This went some way to relieve the situation.

The NDA was first mooted in 1994. It was intended to answer those who claimed that funding was now going to government, thereby starving the not-for-profit sector of resources. Legislation to bring it into existence was passed in November 1998 and, though scheduled to come into existence earlier, it was in fact instituted in March 2000. The NDA is mandated “to grant funds to civil society organizations (CSOs) for the purposes of meeting the developmental needs of poor communities,” and “to strengthen the institutional capacity of CSOs for long term sustainability,” and “to proactively source funds for the NDA” (<http://www.nda.org.za>).

There were tensions between the representatives of not-for-profit organizations and the government on the question of how the NDA should be organized. NGOs felt that civil society was being given an inadequate say in the running of the new organization, that there were inordinate delays in instituting it, and that funding was insufficient. The first director, Dr. Thoahlane Thoahlane, was ousted in April 2001, apparently because of the ineffectiveness of the organization under his leadership. There are indications that the situation has not much improved since then (see, for instance, David MacFarlane “National Development Agency still underperforms” *Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 19 April 2002, <http://archive.mg.co.za>).

An important potential source of funding is the National Lottery, management of which has been outsourced to a private company, Uthingo. This body has been the subject of criticism, from amongst others Dr. Zola Skweyiya, the Minister of Social Development, on the general grounds that a country with many impoverished people should not encourage wasting of resources on

gambling, and specifically because the rate of disbursement to charities, NGOs, and other causes has been enveloped in obscurity and appears to be extremely low in relation to the large sums generated. There have also been complaints that applications have been rejected without any explanation or reference to funding criteria. It was announced by the Minister of Trade and Industry in September 2002 that the National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund had accumulated more than R439 million by 31 March 2002 and that R210 million had been paid to more than 600 charities by 9 September (*Weekly Mail and Guardian*, 13 Sept. 2002). From the NGO point of view, though billed as state action to support civil society, potential sources such as the NDA and the National Lottery seem to demonstrate a continuing state, or semi-state, control over the purse strings and a narrowing of funding opportunities.

Statutory research organizations—some of which, notably the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), have an interest in education—have divested themselves of their apartheid pasts and are now open to cooperation with NGOs. They are, however, research rather than grant-making organizations, and it is on this level that cooperation is mainly being forged. There is a certain ambiguity here. While the old suspicion of NGOs has dissipated, and while there is considerable cooperation between some NGOs and such bodies, the growing imperative for organizations like the HSRC to reduce reliance on their government grants and to support themselves by carrying out research for which they are paid, means that they are also now in competition with some categories of NGOs. This is nicely epitomized by the collaboration, which it is generally agreed is healthy and constructive even while they in some senses compete, between the Education Policy Research Program of the HSRC and the consortium of educational policy units (EPUs) at several universities and the CEPD. The EPUs, while based at universities and receiving some degree of university support, are in effect educational research NGOs in that they rely on donor funding and on the proceeds of project work for their existence.

### **NGOs and Government: Service Providers or Critical Voices?**

There is no forum where the educational side of government, NGOs, and other concerned bodies can meet as there is in the sphere of business and labor policy with the National Economic Development and Labor Council. Such a body, a National Education and Training Council, was indeed suggested in a white paper, but in the subsequent six years it has not come into existence. Some provinces have set up provincial councils of this sort, but bodies like teacher unions and school governing bodies tend to be represented there rather than NGOs.

In the view of at least some government officials, one problem with NGO representation on a national council is that there are many NGOs and it is always difficult for the sector to decide who represents them. Nevertheless, there is a range of educational fora in which particular NGOs are represented, such as the bodies dealing with literacy and adult basic education and training, special needs education, and further education and training. It should be noted also that the DOE convened a national convention in late November 2002 that brought together a range of bodies including educational NGOs, indicating increased consciousness by government of the importance of the area.

Government sees the role of NGOs primarily as service providers, or rather, the aspect of the NGO world with which government engages is that of service provision. This is at the heart of the current situation of NGOs. There is no overt objection by government to the critical, advocacy role of NGOs, but this is simply not seen as the point at which NGOs and government interact. The other side of this coin is that government does not see the NGOs as having a role in the making of educational policy, though they may have a considerable role as service providers in how policy is actually implemented. Duncan Hindle suggests that though NGOs may have a legitimate advocacy role, they are not in any true sense representative. “We have a democratic

government ... we make policy here, and we don't need [NGOs] to assist us in that. For those who have read the signs right," he says referring to the service provider role, "I would hope there is a future."

Hindle is making the point that the proper role of an elected government assisted by its civil service is, as it was mandated, to make policy and not to hand this over to NGOs or other bodies that are unrepresentative in an electoral sense. Nevertheless, the making of policy is a complex process. It is certainly true that government decides on policy as finally embodied in legislation. However, in practice many NGOs have played a significant role in providing the data without which policy cannot be intelligently decided upon—and the compilation and presentation of data is in itself never a neutral process. They also, as Hindle himself says, sit upon committees and other bodies where education policy was and is hammered out. Amongst the NGOs interviewed for this research, one can take the examples of Project Literacy's contributions to ABET policy, the IEB's role in assessment, and the important collaborative role of the Education Foundation with the DET and provincial departments of education in providing the data without which effective policy could not have been made.

Hindle points out that the system presents many opportunities for NGOs to make inputs. One example is the hearings on the recent curriculum reform process. Ironically, the group that mobilized perhaps most effectively in this context were the Christian fundamentalists rather than other organizations probably with a bigger constituency and certainly with a broader approach. In Hindle's view, NGOs should be grasping the opportunities available to them. "I think that many of them have not been doing [this] very well, and perhaps not doing it to the extent that they're allowed to do it, and perhaps they've in a sense weakened their own influence."

Nevertheless, though there may be room for some influence on policy, there is no doubt about the direction in which NGOs need to turn. To government, in Hindle's words, NGOs must go "a consultancy or contractor route." Project Literacy, for example, "is quite squarely there," and he argues that, far from this strategy reducing the effectiveness of NGO interventions, it may actually increase it. The two aspects may bolster each other.

Some would probably have difficulty in playing that consultancy/service provider role and would rather stay outside of government, not receiving funds etc. But then that certainly puts them in a very difficult position. There isn't much funding outside of government [which] has a lot of money to spend. ... Where these NGOs are willing to become service providers, it enables them to grow enormously, and those who have ... made that choice are probably the stronger ones around at the moment—those that are working for government in some way. ... It shouldn't undermine their independence.

However, the time has passed when, in Hindle's words, "a little bit of passion and a fax machine" were a sufficient passport to educational relevance. He feels the key distinction is that between a "critical friend," who can point out errors in a constructive way, and a "critic," who prefers to remain outside the entanglements of government on principle.

NGOs are, in fact, less of a problem for government than donors. "When we relate to NGOs, we relate on our own terms. ... When a donor comes, it's their terms they're coming with, and that's where you get caught up," Hindle says. The complexities of European Union (EU) funding are particularly irksome and time-wasting. But if in the case of an NGO "we're able to go out and secure a contract, with our own terms of reference, our conditions set in there, then we're getting work done, and provided it's well done, well managed ... then that's adding value." This is a key

point: government is confident that the ground on which it interacts with NGOs is clearly defined and controlled by itself. This ground is that of service provision, where the DOE calls the tune. Donors are not similarly susceptible to government control.

Employing NGOs as service providers does not, from the point of view of the administration, necessarily reduce the workload. The process still has to be managed. In some provinces, the problem is that the capacity does not exist to manage the projects well, which can lead to problems. A good example in recent times is the Imbewu Project in the Eastern Cape, a province with a very difficult inheritance from the past and many contemporary social, economic, and administrative problems. Funded with £7.5 million from the British Department for International Development (DFID) and led by Jonathan Godden, whose personal background was in educational NGOs, in 1997 this ambitious project started to upgrade a large number of primary schools administratively and pedagogically and to improve administration in the provincial DOE. NGOs such as the East London-based Institute of Training and Education for Capacity-building (ITEC) and others were a crucial part of the initiative. As Godden said:

Provincial departments don't have the human resources to be able to interact directly, one on one, with each NGO working for them, which is what the NGOs want. What Imbewu is therefore trying to do is to engineer a different kind of relationship between the department of education and NGOs, whereby the department retains overall direction but deals with the NGOs and co-ordinates their activities through Imbewu. (*Financial Mail*, <http://secure.financialmail.co.za/report/educate/fsys2.htm>).

Unfortunately, the relationship between Imbewu and the provincial department of education soured, with Imbewu perceived as becoming a sort of over-mighty subject. Duncan Hindle argues that Imbewu

came very close to effectively being an alternative Department of Education, in terms of size, scope, funding—no: not funding, because they don't pay teachers, that's big money—but in terms of *discretionary* funding ... [I]f a teacher had a problem, they'd phone Imbewu—"the Department will never help you: go and speak to them," that kind of thing—and clearly that built up huge antagonisms within the Department, and probably then some negative attitudes emerged as a result of that.

The result was that the director of the project stepped down from his post, and Imbewu, while it still continues to operate, was brought more directly within the ambit of the provincial DOE.

The point is that, largely for historical reasons, the Eastern Cape is administratively one of the weakest provinces in South Africa, educationally and otherwise. Conflict between NGOs and government is perhaps more likely to stem from governmental weakness than from strength. The national DOE and provinces with a more robust organizational base capable of providing close and effective management do not necessarily feel themselves threatened by NGOs in the same way and tend not to come into conflict with them as a result.

Lack of capacity can generate a cycle of mediocrity. Very often, says Bobby Soobrayan of the DOE, government departments do not give a clear brief to NGOs. However, problems of capacity are not the exclusive privilege of government at provincial or national levels. They also characterize large parts of the NGO sector. There is a shortage of high-level personnel in South Africa in many areas, and NGOs are often unable to attract the quality of person that they need to carry out their remits.

Soobrayan says that the quality of material from many NGOs “is very uneven. We sit too often with instances where what we get back from NGOs is, frankly, unusable or very poor quality.” Sometimes, he argues, NGOs doing some investigation for government are not familiar with current work in the area in which they are involved. Sometimes they lack technical skills or mechanically and repeatedly use the same research methods with little consideration for what is truly appropriate. Sometimes “it’s just poor work.” While positive generally about the dilemmas of NGOs, he is skeptical about some claims to lost critical independence. “Basic technical quality is a problem. ... It’s not ... [that] ... the only problem with NGOs at the moment is ‘we’re losing our soul and we’re losing our critical distance because we are providers.’ They’re not yet providers.” To break this vicious circle of obscure and ill-defined project briefs and inadequate NGO responses—neither of which, of course, is the invariable rule—is a major challenge.

### **Conclusion**

Relations between educational NGOs and government have been and will continue to be crucial. They can be summarized as follows: For a relatively brief period after 1994, government attempted many tasks that had previously been handled by NGOs. Accordingly, donor funding was channeled away from NGOs and towards government. Subsequently, policy changed towards an emphasis on the free market, but this was not reflected in a loosening of central control over funding. This led to difficulties for educational NGOs and to the demise of many. This situation was exacerbated by the halting progress of government’s plans to distribute funding to “civil society” organizations.

Since direct funding of NGOs had become so minimal, the relationship between government and educational NGOs tended almost entirely to default to that of contractor and service-provider. The NGOs that made this transition are those that are currently gaining contracts and tenders with government, thereby assisting government with its key problems of capacity and service delivery. However, though this is a very important service, the narrowing of focus to service delivery has ambiguous consequences in terms of the role of NGOs as educational commentators and critics and, by extension, as independent voices within civil society generally.

Government appears now to have no objection to direct and independent relations between donors and NGOs. However, this has become a relatively small aspect of overall funding for educational NGOs and is thus no threat to overall official hegemony. It would appear that government has, in effect, succeeded in laying down the terms of the relationship between itself and the educational NGO sector. This is so pronounced that donors, with their independent financial base, in spite of their general willingness to accede to the centralization of funding with the government, are at times from the official point of view more problematically independent than NGOs themselves.

NGOs should not be romanticized. There are very real problems of capacity in the area. Nevertheless, if educational NGOs are to be enabled to play a role as constructively critical educational researchers and experimenters in addition to their earnings through service provision within the established educational system, they will require support in the research and experimentation that can be of such value to the country as a whole, with the necessary safeguards in terms of quality of work and value for money.

## 5. Keeping Going in a Changing Environment: NGOs, Donors, and the Market

### Background to Funding

Precise figures relating to the financing of South African NGOs, and in particular relating to donors, are difficult to come by. However, the broad outline of the South African situation is reasonably clear within a historical context. In the period before 1990 and through the transitional period until 1994, almost all educational NGOs worked in complete financial independence from the then government. Funding came from governmental or private sources overseas or from domestic sources.

Given the circumstances of the time and taking into account that the demand worldwide for financial accountability and clearly measurable results has increased over the past decade or so, it should be said that control over funding was not always as close as it has subsequently become. There was a premium on political commitment, sometimes to the neglect of careful administration, and at times this led to slipshod accounting in education as in other areas. Sometimes, this shaded into embezzlement.

### Donor and Funding Organizations and Sources: An Overview

It is difficult to give precise figures on what donors contribute or to define exactly what a donor is. As Cawthra, Kraak, and Maepa say, “quantitative, and to some extent qualitative, information on South African nonprofit sector income and funding is very scarce and highly contested” (Cawthra *et al.*: 2000). With commercial organizations in particular, the line between investment and donation can be a fine one. However, in broad terms, the South African donor landscape features a range of domestic and international donors—commercial, private, and governmental. There are large bilateral and multilateral agencies; South African or multinational corporate donors generally flying the “social investment” flag; “international” or “Northern” NGOs, which sometimes act as development agencies themselves but more frequently in the South African context serve as conduits for aid under the rubric of “partnership” to South African NGOs that carry out the actual development work; and South African and other foundations. The South African government is a crucial and growing participant as has been discussed in the last chapter. Since these organizations come from different perspectives and have different constituencies, it is difficult to generalize about their roles. Also, increasingly, as well as receiving donor assistance, many educational NGOs generate resources through commercial or semi-commercial activities.

Though there are organizations like the Southern African Grantmakers’ Association, the Business Trust, and other less formalized networks of nonbusiness donors, donor involvement is varied and in general uncoordinated. This lack of coordination has its disadvantages, though from an NGO point of view a possible danger of extended centralization is further concentration on direct aid to government and increased marginalization of the necessarily diverse NGO sector.

In their 2000 study, Cawthra, Kraak, and Maepa say that:

It would seem that there has been a withdrawal of foreign funds to the nonprofit sector from at least 1994, and that this has not been substituted by an influx of domestic funds, either from government or from other sources. Most experts argue that this has plunged the nonprofit sector into a major funding crisis, which can be divided into two phases: a foreign funding crisis mainly between 1994 and 1996, and a primarily domestic funding crisis from 1996 onwards (Cawthra *et al.*, 2000: 67).



Seen from 2003, the situation may not be quite as bleak as this implies, at least for those educational NGOs that have managed to orient themselves towards the governmental and commercial or semi-commercial opportunities that are available. Whether this means excessively diluting the critical and advocacy roles that many consider characteristic of and necessary for NGOs is another matter. Certainly this is what some NGOs fear. In the words of Marlene Jardine of the Catholic Institute of Education (CIE), “donors are beginning to call the tune, and it’s not always educationally well informed ... I’m concerned that business is going to try to impose its values and way of doing things ... on the educational system, as if education is a commodity to be sold.”

Others differ. An example is Sharanjeet Shan of the Mathematics Center for Professional Teachers, whose organization obtains support only from South African donors, most of them corporate. She describes a relationship based on shared understanding of the importance of mathematics and science and on how this importance should be reflected in educational work. Such differences represent the contrasting directions from which educational NGOs can come. This issue will be taken up in the next chapter.

### **Should Donors Operate in South Africa?**

There is, however, an anterior question. Should donors operate in South Africa at all in any considerable way? This was a question that many international NGOs asked themselves around the time when the country achieved majority rule. For example Oxfam, which had earlier worked with groups dissenting from the apartheid policy of the time, decided to maintain a presence in the country. However, given the comparative wealth of South Africa and what could be thought of as the more pressing needs elsewhere, Oxfam and many other international NGOs decided to keep their presence at a fairly limited level.

South Africa is a middle-income society. It is also a society where income is more unevenly distributed than almost anywhere else in the world. The arguments for donor activity in South Africa ought to be carefully considered in relation to these facts. It can be said that donors should encourage work for the welfare of impoverished South Africans—though the main responsibility here may lie with the South African government and civil society to work for more equal distribution. It can also be argued that South Africa’s particular legacy of institutionalized racism and discrimination merits more attention by donors than might be justified at first sight by national income. Noneconomic and financial factors, such as the maintenance of a vibrant civil society, of which NGOs are an important component, should be considered. South Africa is also one of the most important democracies on the African continent and the most substantial economy. Its political and economic well-being are of crucial significance to other Southern African countries, grouped in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), and increasingly to countries further north. This is another reason for donors to pay particular attention to South Africa, and in particular to the health of its civil society, which is represented in part by the numerous South African NGOs.

In South Africa, donor funding is not as absolutely crucial as it appears to be in many African countries, some of which survive through donor aid. In spite of all of South Africa’s problems, donors are not trapped by basic imperatives of hunger and institutional and infrastructural decay. However, this is not an argument for the withdrawal of donor aid to South Africa or South African NGOs. The country can be seen as providing an opportunity for focussed, creative support for nonstandard initiatives. Arguably, donor aid can make a real difference as opposed to desperately attempting to hold back a tide of near-absolute impoverishment.

Donors should of course consider such arguments in relation to their own priorities. However, taken together they add up to a persuasive case for donor involvement in South Africa, especially with its education and training sectors that are so closely related to the well-being of the economy and civil society and with educational NGOs that can be anticipated to think and operate in creative ways that feed back into the mainstream, given the opportunity. This is not an argument for neglecting large government-initiated projects and the NGOs that often operate within them, but rather for remaining alert to the independent role that NGOs can play in education and other sectors. It is also an argument for supplying these NGOs with sufficient funding and for assuring them of the space and independence to utilize it.

The relationship between donors and South African NGOs, which is influenced by the history dealt with in the first part of this report, has dimensions that are less prominent in other parts of Africa. For one thing, there is a strong domestic component to donors in South Africa. For another, the government is cash-rich as compared to most other African states. Doubtless the bulk of donor funding will continue to go to government, as has been the case since 1994.

However, there are arguments for broadening donor outreach. One relates to the ability of the government to absorb donor funds. Sometimes the problem is not so much an absence of resources but rather the shortage of the skills that would enable such resources to be used constructively and prudently. Underspending is a real problem in some areas of South African national and provincial governments for a combination of reasons including inflexible bureaucratic procedures and difficulties in rapidly defining appropriate projects. Donor resources, therefore, are at times welcomed by government not so much because they represent a solution to an absolute lack of resources, but rather because they may be used with more apparent flexibility than internally-generated funds. This flexibility often includes the utilizing of NGOs.

However, an increase in direct funding of NGOs is an additional option open to donors. This is particularly the case in areas where government has achieved less than it anticipated over the past decade. ABET and early childhood development are cases in point. Donors can encourage and support such areas. There need be no implication of challenging or criticizing government by adopting a focus of this kind since in terms of policy, government emphasizes such sectors. While continuing to insist on adequate reporting and accountability, donors should probably feel comfortable with encouraging the probing of possibilities that NGO structures at their best may allow. There may at times be “failures,” and everything possible should be done to avoid them, but in the last analysis, a proportion of experiments that do not succeed is the inevitable price of a more adventurous policy.

### **Donors and NGOs: Perspectives on Accountability and Effectiveness**

If resources mean power, then undoubtedly NGOs tend to be the weakest party in the government-donor-NGO triangle. As has been seen in Section 4, government largely dictates the terms of service delivery upon which it works with NGOs. This has powerfully molded these organizations since 1994. Since donors hold some of the purse strings, they can also exercise a powerful influence in ways that may at times differ in emphasis from government.

Nonetheless, NGOs sometimes charge that donors concentrate on project-specific funding, ignoring their need for support with overheads, training, organizational development, and the like and turning NGO activity into a treadmill of insufficiently grounded project activity. They complain that they are being hemmed in by increasingly rigorous demands for accountability, and by increasingly onerous reporting protocols relating to their financial and human resource management capabilities.

It would be difficult and undesirable to make a case against rigorous accountability, though such demands should be seen against the much more tolerant standards of the pre-1994 period. Where such demands may stand out is when they are seen in relation to the move away from funding for organizational development, a move only partly mitigated by training schemes operated by international NGOs and other organizations. In other words, demands for accountability and reporting are increasing, but the means of satisfying them, on the whole, are not. Some NGOs feel themselves caught in a vice not of their own making.

Some donors have been uneasy about the use of NGOs to manage development aid, fearing that this subverts management capacity within government. In a context where the political and administrative arms of government have absorbed many of the most capable personnel from the NGO sector, this argument has a certain irony. It could in fact be inverted and the case made that substantial funding should be directed to NGOs since their capacity and therefore the vitality of civil society has been subverted by government's absorption of NGO personnel. It also seems misdirected in a world where, at least in theory, there is renewed emphasis on "small government," private initiative and enterprise, and the centrality of civil society.

A complicating factor is South Africa's governmental structure where a number of implementation competencies—including primary and secondary education—are devolved to the provincial level. Those provinces (especially the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Limpopo) that inherited "homelands" designed to divide and control the black population of South Africa under coopted and often corrupt "traditional" elites and that comprise the poorest regions of the country, have also inherited the administrative malaise that characterized these areas. The recent report of the Interim Management Team on the Eastern Cape vividly illustrates this, with its picture of inefficiency, bureaucratic inbreeding and favoritism, corruption, and delivery failure. One effect is that policies primarily developed and decreed at national level often fail in practice at the level of the provinces. Donors may need to consider their mix of disbursement between government and NGOs where such inefficiencies at provincial level will certainly have an impact on the effectiveness of donor aid if it is linked solely to government.

On the other hand, there is the question of sustainability. Are the resources directed to educational NGOs sometimes wasted in that they may not contribute directly to the mainstreaming of the activity with which they are involved? To oversimplify somewhat, the answer to this from the donor perspective will depend on the importance assigned to independent innovation (with the possibility of failure and irrelevance) vis-à-vis institutional continuity and mainstreaming (with the possibility of bureaucratic stasis and inflexibility).

In tune with the emphasis on assisting government, there has been a move in recent years towards funding large donor-assisted schemes, such as the Imbewu Project in the Eastern Cape that links NGOs and government in a united effort for educational development, or Limpopo Province's Khanyisa Education Support Program, which is a partnership comprised of JET (Joint Education Trust) services, Cambridge Education Consultants, DFID, and the Limpopo Education Department. This makes sense in many ways, but again the implications of harnessing NGOs to such projects should be noted. They are likely to be involved in a purely service-delivery role, the parameters of such projects having been determined in advance by government in consultation with donors. This is a valid role for NGOs, but arguably it is not the only or even the most significant one that they could play.

Similar issues arise in relation to the increasing tendency to fund initiatives that are based not so much on South Africa, but on the regional body, SADC. This move away from the domestic makes sense in terms of economies of scale, and in reducing or at least changing the emphasis in

donor aid from relatively prosperous South Africa to the region as a whole, while continuing to recognize the country's centrality to the overall development of the region. It may even be, as will be suggested later in this report, that the regional approach will be to the benefit of South African NGOs that have begun to operate on a Southern African or even continental level. However, while some NGOs have already begun to act regionally, they do so now, and will probably continue to do so, on the basis of a strictly commercial role. This indeed is understandable in the context of often authoritarian regimes that rarely tolerate domestic criticism, with some notable exceptions like Botswana, let alone that from externally-based NGOs. So again, expansion of scale, this time across borders, tends not to encourage critical exploration or advocacy by South African NGOs.

With this background, we now turn to the specifics of donor activity and organization in South Africa.

### **South African Trusts and Foundations**

There is a variety of South African trusts and foundations drawing their funds from various foreign and domestic sources. It is difficult to generalize about or quantify their incomes, and what is more many seem to be diversifying their sources through various means such as investment or by themselves becoming managers of funding for government or other authorities. An interesting and important example in the educational sphere is JET, examined below. Other such bodies relevant to education are the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, which commenced operations in 1995 and draws funds both from South Africa and abroad, and the Kagiso Trust, which goes back to 1986. At a time when there were no direct relations with government, it was the main channel for EU funding to South Africa.

While EU funding has diminished, the Kagiso Trust has shifted to an overtly commercial role, and provides an interesting example of how such organizations can respond to the pressures of contemporary South Africa and the wider world. The rapid spread of commercial methods of organization and ways of thinking is not confined to NGOs but also affects donors. Kagiso's website banner statement succinctly expresses this new corporate image, modified by aspirations to social service and community commitment:

At the juncture of business and community is a unique South African group—Kagiso. Based on the core values of peace, trust, enterprise, and empowerment, Kagiso is committed to improving our society by engaging in exceptional business operations in our selected industry—financial services and investing the proceeds thereof in self-help community development projects. As a company we have confidence in the future, our market, our people and our ability to succeed. Kagiso. The Difference is Trust.

The grey area between foundations or trusts created by commercial corporations but operating independently and corporate social investment—which does not have this independence—is further complicated by this increasing tendency for some donor organizations to transform themselves into commercial or semi-commercial entities. The history of JET, which has been crucial to the survival of many South African educational NGOs, is also instructive.

As has been seen, there was a traumatic period for many NGOs during and after the transition to majority rule. There were nevertheless some ways in which this trauma was eased. JET played an important role in this. Its history should be seen in relation to that of the earlier Urban Foundation (UF) from which in some respects it grew. The UF was an organization—a sort of corporate NGO—set up by big business in South Africa after the revolt of 1976 to respond to the conditions

under which urbanizing black people were obliged to live. It worked particularly in the sphere of housing but also in education. Given the tense politics of the time, it came under considerable criticism for being, in the view of many on the left, a manipulative organization designed to deflect real change.

However, such positions began to seem less certain with the changes of the early 1990s. With the foundation of the state-backed IDT in 1990, Anglo American and De Beers—two enormously significant players in the South African economy and society—moved to found a parallel Private Sector Initiative (PSI). Other corporations became involved, and soon pledges worth R560 million over five years had been made, worth more than R1 billion in current terms. It was agreed that the focus should be on improvement of the quality of education and on the relationship between education and the world of work.

Remarkably, the South African scene, though wracked by conflict at this time, was changing sufficiently to make it possible for elements in society that were once mutually hostile or at least highly suspicious of each other to begin to come together for the common good. Contact was made between the incipient organization and groupings that for more than 30 years had been operating in exile or under banning orders. Finally, in January 1992 JET formally came into existence, with a board upon which were represented leading private companies and political, educational, labor, and business organizations. It called itself an NGO, though in many ways in this early period it was more of a donor organization. As Hemant Waghmarae, divisional manager at JET Education Services, says, “It was a weird thing. I don’t know why we called ourselves an NGO, but we were always known as an NGO.”

The ANC and its allies were supporters of the RDP. However, they were also represented at quite a high level on the board of JET. If there is a contradiction here, it should be ascribed to the fluid nature of the politics of the time, with many cross-cutting influences and a still unsettled policy environment. In the transitional period from 1992 to about 1997, this apparently disparate but effective organization provided support for many worthwhile educational ventures, distributing grants that were generally of R100,000 to R1 million. This also constituted a guarantee of the future survival of the educational NGO sector, or at least of vital parts of it. Even while on one level the centralizing tendencies in the government seemed to dominate, there were at other levels, including JET, currents that ran counter to this. Thus, the majority of the nearly 400 educational NGOs that JET supported from 1992 to 1997 still survive. Crucially, JET facilitated the transition to the new dispensation when other funding was disappearing.

The history of JET in recent years throws light on the way in which the funding environment, and the educational NGO sector as a whole, is changing. The funding that JET was originally allocated was a single large grant to bridge what the founders could see was going to be an awkward transition. With a considerable sum of money still available but no further large grants to be expected, and with the stronger educational NGOs beginning to be able to stand, if sometimes shakily, on their own feet, it became necessary to reconsider the organization’s role in the light of contemporary realities and its own history. It had built up a considerable body of expertise in disbursing and handling money in the educational environment and remained with a commitment to the education of the most disadvantaged. On the one hand, the organization diversified into a Workforce Division on commercial lines. This originated in the wish to train unemployed workers and youths. However, the logic of commercial organization is that business must be obtained where and whenever it is available. As Hemant Waghmarae says, “There is a bit of a disjuncture now [with] our original noble intentions ... because now we have to earn our living. ... We don’t want to be called a consultancy, yet in some ways we are one. And then we’re saying, ‘no, we’re a development organization, we’re a development consultancy.’” In fact,

he says they will not do anything simply because they are qualified to do it. It is a difficult course to navigate, as he acknowledges.

JET therefore is feeling its way into the new environment of collaboration between government, foreign and domestic donors, and NGOs. From the mid-1990s, various donors, in part acknowledging the probity and expertise of JET's handling of money, also began to channel grants through the organization. JET's expertise in administering money for educational purposes has thus been put to use on a large scale in fundholding and administration. Further, the organization has capitalized on its expertise to extend its own research function. All this has led JET towards defining its core business in the field of large project management in school and workforce development.

It is difficult to find a precise formulation for JET as it exists now. Many of its current activities are carried out under the banner of JET Educational Services, a title that aptly reflects the change in emphasis. It has grown from its original incarnation as a hybrid donor agency and NGO but seems not to have gone so completely down the road of commercialization as Kagiso. Since 2000 it has been financially self-supporting. In a way, it is a business, but it is also an NGO, if by this term is meant a body that is not beholden to the government and whose aim is not to make a profit, perhaps more than it was in its earlier incarnation in that its donor persona is less prominent and its own implementation role more so. The effort to define it certainly raises interesting questions about the nature of the whole NGO area. Perhaps indeed Hemant Waghmarae's phrase "development consultancy" describes JET as well as anything.

### **Corporate Social Investment**

The line between corporate social investment and more strictly donor organizations can be a fine one. As seen, JET utilized corporate funds and grew from the earlier corporate-founded and funded UF. However, in the important phase of the early and mid-1990s, it is generally considered to have stood consciously outside the more obvious corporate pressures. Other bodies are more immediately related to the large and powerful South African corporate world. The giant of this world is the Anglo American and De Beers Chairman's Fund, distributing grants to the amount of about R50 million per year and by 1998 financing the building of classrooms alone to the tune of R30 million, according to the Fund itself.

Many big South African companies or multinational companies operating in South Africa have now spun off organizations whose role tends to be seen as community investment and involvement rather than the earlier and more limited conception of social responsibility. Eskom, the Liberty Life Foundation, Coca-Cola South Africa, Toyota South Africa, and many others are significant organizations in this field. Studies of funding from these organizations are weakened by the difficulty of getting reliable figures and the tendency for such organizations to portray initiatives that mainly benefit their employees or even the parent company itself as disinterested. Thus, an estimate of R1,544 million from this area in 1997 in the Business Market Intelligence's *Corporate Social Investment and Development Handbook, 1998* may be an overestimate.

The period around and immediately after 1994 was one when it was not clear which way the South African politico-economic cat would jump. With GEAR, it jumped in a direction helpful to the corporate sector. Arguably, this made it less crucial for the sector to demonstrate its *bona fides*, though certainly corporate support by no means ceased thereafter. It would appear that education is the most important recipient of corporate social investment support, with 96 percent of respondents saying that they contribute in this area and about 60 percent of total spending going to this sector (Cawthra *et al.*: 79-80). This concentration on education is influenced by the

tax regime that makes it logical to contribute in this area, though with the new taxation framework discussed in Chapter 3 this perhaps is becoming less so.

### **Multilateral and Bilateral Aid**

The reduction of overseas funding to South African educational NGOs, while significant, is not always the complete disaster that it would be in other parts of Africa. South Africa generates large resources domestically and does not rely on overseas aid unlike some other countries where a large sometimes preponderant proportion of their national income is obtained from foreign subsidies. Andrew Miller of Project Literacy expresses it vigorously. South African NGOs, he says, “are not run by donors. In all those other countries for me it was a ghastly learning experience to see that ... those donors control what government does.” He says the World Bank, structural adjustment, and DFID are in charge. South Africa has the financial and intellectual resources to show such donors the door “and I’m very glad we do that. Because we [are] ... arrogant South Africans. And I think that’s a good arrogance, quite frankly.”

International donors, he continues, often say they are tired of the South African DOE, which rolls over funds year after year because they are unable to spend them. Yet, when it is suggested that they should put money into those NGOs that have the capacity to spend on education fruitfully and quickly, they seldom do so. He implies this is because of a belief that such capacity is insufficiently robust. At the same time, in other African countries such donors claim that they *would* put more funds into “civil society” if NGOs were stronger, more honest, and the like. For want of anything better, it is the big international NGOs that benefit. But, he says, “if you really believe that democracy is about a strong civil society, then you’ve got to put money into it.” By all means support government, “but you can’t completely dump NGOs.”

With the coming of nonracial democracy, western donors, upon whom large sections of the NGO community had relied, tended to attenuate their programs of support to this sector in favor of more conventional government-to-government links. Previously, such support had been given to the voluntary sector under relatively relaxed financial conditions, as part of the attempt to nudge South Africa towards democracy. Though there is a lack of data—and what there is is somewhat contradictory (see Cawthra *et al*: 84-86 for a good review of the evidence)—it appears that the proportion of such finance going to NGOs has drastically declined. In addition, pledges to assist or commitment to disburse are often low even where there are direct relations with NGOs. This is particularly the case with donors such as Sweden, Germany, and the EU, in distinction from those such as Japan, Finland, and Norway, where the bureaucracy involved is apparently lesser and the rate of disbursement higher. Though there have been efforts to improve the situation, this is of especial concern with the EU, which is a major donor but whose application and funding protocols are notoriously complex.

Apart from the EU, other multilateral donors to South Africa include the World Bank and various United Nations (UN) agencies. While the bulk of UN funding appears to be channeled through government, the United Nations Development Program does work closely with NGOs, some of them educational. In terms of overall economic policy, the World Bank is an important influence, and policies similar to those of the structural adjustment programs familiar from elsewhere have indeed been implemented. However, in the case of South Africa this has been done voluntarily to escape the semi-autarchic and heavily state-influenced economic policies of the apartheid era, rather than reluctantly as the result of economic collapse and through economic *force majeure*, as in many other African countries. Thus, while South Africa has implemented large-scale educational reform, this is not necessarily to a World Bank pattern and has not been carried out with World Bank funding as has often been the case elsewhere.

Important bilateral donors to South Africa include the United States through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Kingdom through DFID, and the Scandinavian countries. In the latter case, the long tradition of assistance to the South African liberation struggle, which included assistance to many dissenting educational NGOs within the country and to the education of South Africans in exile, continues into the contemporary period.

USAID is the largest bilateral donor to South Africa, and its relationship with educational NGOs illustrates many of the tendencies in this sector. Before 1994, USAID's main point of entry into South African society was through support of NGOs since, in spite of covert counter-currents under the Reagan administration such as the backing for the South African invasion of Angola, the overt policy of the United States government was not officially to support what it considered the illegitimate government of South Africa. USAID stressed education. It particularly emphasized scholarships for black South Africans at higher education institutions in the United States and also supported educational NGOs such as the South African Committee for Higher Education Development (SACHED) and the Teachers Opportunity Programmes.

With the coming of majority rule, USAID began to channel the greater part of its funding through the government. This, however, did not mean the end of the organization's relationship with NGOs, either directly or indirectly, through the subcontracting of tasks by government to NGOs using USAID funding. However, there was a shift in approach. In the words of Cashief Lombard of USAID/South Africa, there can be no problem in working with NGOs as long as they operate professionally "almost on the basis of a business." They must be accountable, and indeed he feels that the best of them have adapted and become more pragmatic, "buying into government policy." Government clearance is crucial at all stages, and in the end "it comes down to the deliverables. We need a deliverable that we're happy with."

There are different routes for NGOs (or any organization) to receive USAID funding. One is their annual call for innovative proposals. Here again, if a proposal seems useful, it is submitted to the government for approval before the funding process proceeds. In USAID's portfolio of projects, education remains important. Between 1994 and 1998, resources were channeled particularly into educational policy development. Today, support for the development of the broad range of Sectoral Education and Training Authorities—a completely new initiative—is a priority.

The different donor agencies collaborate. A donor forum, the majority of whose participants are international donors, meets once a month with the national DOE. This forum ensures that there is no duplication between the work of the different donors either thematically or geographically. It is notable also that the strong relationship between this category of donors and government, not precisely at the expense of NGOs but certainly in such a way as to categorize them firmly as service delivery vehicles, is mirrored in the relationship with American NGOs. USAID has not and will not bring U.S. NGOs into South Africa, unless as prime contractors with South African NGOs being the actual presence in terms of implementation.

### **Foreign Foundations and Trusts**

Private foundations and trusts, being relatively free from the political entanglements that inevitably enmesh official organizations, played a prominent role in South Africa before 1994. Governments sometimes used such organizations to channel money to South African NGOs critical of the regime of the time, thus keeping themselves at a slight distance from direct involvement. Such foundations and trusts were able to respond to a Western public opinion that increasingly turned against apartheid.



With the coming of majority rule and consequent direct government-to-government relations, the role of these organizations diminished somewhat. However, there has been a continuing presence by foreign foundations and trusts, with bodies such as the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the Ford Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, and others having field offices in the country or region. Many of such organizations are heavily involved in educational programs, often within a regional rather than a solely South African context.

The large international or Northern NGOs that are so visible in many other parts of the continent do not have a major presence in South Africa, though a number have offices in the country. These international NGOs are referred to again in the next chapter.

### **Conclusion**

Like all aspects of the sector, the changing funding environment for South African NGOs should be read against the history of at least the past 15 years. In many ways, the financing of South African NGOs, seen in a world perspective, did not follow a normal trajectory up to the 1990-94 period. Internationally, the tendency from approximately the early 1980s and accelerated by the fall of the socialist states of Eastern Europe was to default to market-oriented policies that only allowed for success measured in ways sometimes quite misleading in their apparent accuracy, but at least appearing to give some kind of certitude and objectivity. South Africa, however, for a time followed a different trajectory, untypical for the time, where radical political commitment played a stronger role given the struggle for basic human rights and freedoms. In this context many donors were willing to apply less economically and more ideologically-driven criteria in supporting South African NGOs.

With the upheavals of the early 1990s, South Africa in many ways lost its special position, and the changes that had been steadily advancing in other parts of the world hit the sector with shocking rapidity and intensity. Donors altered their funding policies, applying new and more rigorous criteria. Government, from being the enemy by definition, became on the one hand a rival for funding, and on the other the major and often demanding customer for the products and services (this new vocabulary in itself is indicative of the changed atmosphere) of educational NGOs. Those that correctly read the signs of the times grasped the roles of service-provider or consultant and sometimes flourished; those that failed to do so were often marginalized and frequently disappeared, amongst them some that were prominent in the period of the struggle against apartheid.

On the other hand, direct donor aid to South African educational NGOs did continue, although on a reduced scale. To what extent was this linked to the contemporary discourse of “small government” and at least ostensible suspicion of the overweening state and to the wish to maintain a sphere of influence both inside and outside the state? How, if at all, does the role of critical advocate that many consider a vital and intrinsic aspect of NGOs, and that was certainly characteristic of many South African educational NGOs in the 1980s and early ‘90s, apply in this context? This is the theme to which we now turn.

## 6. From Protest to Advocacy

### **NGOs and Advocacy: The International Context**

“Advocacy” is a word that saturates the language of NGOs internationally. Taken at its most positive, it implies a commitment to the poor, the disadvantaged, and those whose voices are not heard. The more questionable aspect of this word is perhaps the suggestion of missionary paternalism with which NGOs from the North that concern themselves with the South have always struggled uneasily: why should people from another class or nation “advocate for” those with whom they seem to have no organic links?

Literature emanating from the large Northern NGOs tends to ponder their role anxiously vis-à-vis development and ask whether they can truly be said to represent the interests of “the poor.” As a recent Oxfam study puts it, metropolitan NGOs “have a particular duty to avoid projecting their own institutional or sectoral interests as though these necessarily represent the interests of people living in poverty” (Eade and Ligteringen, 2001: 17). This is a key issue given that they have no organic connection with the societies they attempt to serve. Some would even claim that Northern NGOs could be seen as an informal extension of metropolitan influence in African countries, with a similar collection of ambiguities clustered around them as had missionaries at an earlier historical period.

However, these debates within Northern NGOs speak only indirectly to the South African situation. The large overseas NGOs that are major features of the educational and other landscapes in many other African countries are not so prominent in South Africa. As Hermant Waghmarae of JET, an organization at the heart of nongovernmental educational funding for the past decade, puts it, “they don’t really play a significant role ... it’s different to other places. Oxfam, Africare, the Open Society Foundation, and others do have offices in South Africa, but they are not a major presence in the South African NGO world.” There are several reasons for this. In many African countries, even quite small amounts of money from NGOs and the like represent a significant part of expenditure. South Africa, however, is richer than any other African country, and the amounts of money generated domestically make contributions by these agencies of relatively minor importance.

This crucial domestic funding is from government sources and from the large South African corporate sector, with some from other domestic charitable sources. Also, perhaps in part because of South Africa’s historical resonance in the world’s imagination and its current importance, and in spite of some withdrawal in recent years with the relative normalizing of South African society, substantial donor funds from national and multilateral agencies have entered the country. All this contributes to the relatively low profile of international NGOs, which tend to concentrate their resources on countries less able to support themselves than South Africa (Smith and Bornstein, 2001).

### **Advocacy in South Africa**

The South African context has given a particular twist to this story. Though it can shade into outright opposition, advocacy implies acceptance of existing power structures, however critical those advocating might be of them. However, the particular situation in the country before 1994 meant that the stance of many NGOs was one of outright, even revolutionary, opposition to the authorities. South African NGOs, in other words, were in general obliged to be highly political, even when that politicization consisted of an attempt to maneuver around or engage with the existing power structures. Secondly, while questions of class and race in relation to NGOs could

be as apposite in South Africa as anywhere in the world, they were rooted in the country, and South African NGOs did not experience the need to justify their presence in or concern for their society as international NGOs sometimes feel they must.

It has been seen that the pressures for educational NGOs to become delivery agencies in contemporary South Africa are substantial. Some have resisted this and have often paid for this resistance by disappearing or at least remaining small and ineffective. Many of the most successful organizations are going down the delivery agency road, often with enthusiasm, and generally with few qualms that their advocacy role is being compromised. In a sense this seems at variance with their earlier trajectory, and it is worth asking what is happening here.

One answer is the simple one of survival. There are jobs and individual futures at stake in a country that, while relatively wealthy in African terms, is far from being able to guarantee future employment, even to those with the educational and other skills that NGO employees tend to possess.

However, more fundamentally, NGOs could move in two directions. They could maintain their earlier stance and find themselves apparently without a *raison d'être*, or they could go down the road of cooperation and service delivery. Brought up with the rhetoric of revolution rather than that of advocacy, it was in fact possible with the revolution having been achieved and the government now representing the majority for NGOs to see the implementation of the new government's program as a continuation of the struggle rather than a deviation from their previous defiant stance. Thus the debate that continually wracks Northern NGOs about their relevance and the nature of their role in the South seems not to have touched South African NGOs to the same extent. Some at least move "into Africa," as will be seen, without much interrogation of their role in relation to the spread of South African influence and indeed, in many cases, with a sense that South Africans *per se* are likely to have more of a feeling for the rest of the continent and may do a better job than those working for organizations from the North. This may quite possibly be true, and it is not being argued that this spread of South African influence in part through the medium of South African NGOs is a sinister phenomenon. However, it is intriguing that this expansion appears to be interpreted with so little reference to debates elsewhere in NGO circles, even if the parallels were to be dismissed as misleading.

In any case, what is "advocacy" in the context of NGOs? On one level it presumably means an attempt to engage with and even mobilize those with whom NGOs work so as to enable them to articulate their needs and their conceptions of how these needs might be met. For example, the health education and HIV/AIDS NGO Soul City feels that it was the crucial voice in bringing the question of domestic violence to public attention. Indeed, this is now a very lively issue in South African public debate. On another level more relevant to this study it presumably means at least an attempt at active engagement with the authorities so that the needs of the poor are heard at that level and are acted upon as effectively as possible by those with the power to make a difference in their lives. This in turn would presumably involve an attempt to influence the policy-making process in the interests of what NGOs would consider their constituency. On a general level, this is what the South African National NGO Coalition (SANGOCO) attempts to do.

The implication is that NGOs are uniquely well placed to act in this role of interlocutor between elements in society assumed to have difficulties in communicating with and understanding each other. It is easy to see that government might be sensitive to this implication, especially a government such as that of South Africa that has emerged quite recently from a liberation movement founded on the conviction that it represented the poorest and most oppressed people of the country.

There is a range of approaches to the whole question of advocacy. Depending on their sphere of activity, some NGOs skirt around the question through an ideology of professionalism and immersion in the job at hand. Of course, this implies that the overall framework, in large part set by government, is sufficiently conducive to enable them to operate without obliging them to challenge it. Sharanjeet Shan, the director of the Mathematics Center for Professional Teachers, a highly professional and effective organization dedicated to improving the grasp of mathematics and science in South African schools, rejects categorization as an NGO. She is an educationalist, she says, who wants to deliver an excellent professional service that will advance the mathematical understanding and skills of black South African children. "I have no altruistic kind of motives or anything." She continues, "If a person in an interview says 'I want to help children,' they've lost the interview already. If they say, 'I want to grow professionally, I want to deliver a proper service,' we can talk more." While her organization liaises with government continuously, especially at provincial and local levels, in the pursuit of its objectives, she rejects involvement with policy matters, which she considers a diversion from the work of her organization. She does not release her staff to go to officially-organized workshops and the like. The Mathematics Center considers that its proper role is to concentrate single-mindedly on the educational tasks that it has set itself.

However, policy and the attempt to influence policy do often matter, and it would appear that many of those NGOs in a position to do so attempt to influence its direction. Project Literacy, an NGO devoted to activities in the field of ABET, has taken the road of "corporatization," as its director terms it. This important theme will be taken up elsewhere, but in this context the question is its effect on advocacy, which is also an issue of policy. Andrew Miller, the chief executive officer, asserts that the organization's corporate persona has not meant the loss of "our faith, or our identity, or our commitment to work with poor people." Project Literacy, he says, played an "enormous" role in generating unit standards in ABET, in working towards the new curriculum, in the National Qualifications Framework, in the South African Qualifications Authority, in piloting adult literacy examinations, and the like. And the effects of this in the field of ABET were considerable in policy terms with South Africa leading the world in linking adult learning to the world of work and in exploring equivalency of formal and informal educational experience.

However, though Andrew Miller argues that NGOs, and Project Literacy in particular, have had a very important role in policy development, "if not written a lot of the stuff," the financial and psychic costs of this effort are large. There is a "lack of understanding in government about the new world of NGOs. ... [D]onors have been saying to NGOs 'you've got to become self-sufficient, run like a business.'" In other words, NGOs should charge the full economic rate for services. The bureaucratic mindset often appears to be that NGOs should do things for free, or at least not charge the full rate. Ironically, while the most successful NGOs have moved on into a new, more professional approach, some in government, he argues, remain convinced that the DOE should continue to reap the benefits of NGO work.

Further, if NGOs depend on government tenders to survive, it is difficult for them to remain open to being critical of government policy when necessary. Having been quoted in a Sunday newspaper as critical of some aspect of DOE policy, Andrew Miller was rung early on the following Monday morning by a senior official reminding him that "you don't bite the hand that feeds you." The difficulty, he feels, is to get the balance right between "being a service provider to the state but also ... maintaining the ability to be critical. And *that's* the difference with a commercial provider, because a commercial provider would never be critical." He argues further that donor money is crucial in this context since it gives leeway for some independence. Some donors do not understand this and try to ingratiate themselves at all costs with the DOE. Others,

and he singles out the Dutch as particularly sensitive in this respect, grasp the importance of supporting a sector that can speak with an independent voice and by so doing strengthen civil society through encouraging a multiplicity of voices and ideas.

However, it is necessary to stress complexity and divergence in government as amongst NGOs. Whilst accusations of biting the hand that feeds you may be one informal governmental response, there are also thoughtful voices from within the governmental hierarchy that articulate the tension between delivery and critique and are by no means unsympathetic to the critical role that is key to at least some visions of the role of NGOs. As far as Bobby Soobrayan, the deputy director general for Planning and Monitoring in the national DOE, is concerned, the tension between a role defined by service delivery and the need to maintain a critical edge is “the issue” for NGOs. Academics at least have an independent salary and to some extent a protective and relatively independent institution that may insulate them from the more obvious forms of pressure. NGOs however are circumscribed by the imperative need for the next project and for mere survival:

the consistency of what we’re doing now with the democratic values of our struggle ... gets lost sometimes ... in the exigencies of actual governing. ... I’m saying, unqualified, that it’s a conflict, a problem, it’s a confusion of mission. And at some point I think some NGOs are going to have to make a choice. They either work for government, or you decide that you’ve got an intellectual project, some critical thinking, and ... we find ways in which that can be resourced, because it comes down to finances basically, this thing that mitigates against peoples’ independence.

He would like to see people going between government, NGOs, and universities, though “we are not at that level of maturity at the moment.” In short, “I don’t want to see an NGO that is simply the handmaiden of the state. *That* isn’t going to help us, because then they might as well work in government.”

Soobrayan argues that the only way to ensure the independence he advocates is through a degree of financial independence of government. He suggests some possibilities such as linking appropriate NGOs to universities, accessing funding from independent foundations, or enabling NGOs to benefit from the publication subsidies that already exist for academics. In this respect South Africa, with a strong civil society tradition and relatively copious funding sources, is potentially better off than most African countries, where governments, though weak in many respects, tend to loom large over impoverished citizens. However, it is still going to be difficult to ensure the security and the continuation of this space where systematic and informed comment and, where necessary, critique can be generated.

While many South African NGOs have had a difficult time redefining themselves in relation to government, this could not be said of those NGOs clearly representing a special interest that they must maintain. Examples are the bodies arguing for the role of religion in education. The case for religious education may have had to be made with particular strength and in the face of exceptional difficulties in the apartheid era, but from their point of view, it is no less necessary to make that case in the context of the new government. Of course, there is no one case for religious education, and the bodies putting forward such arguments range from those representing the recent resurgence in Christian and Islamic fundamentalism to those taking a more moderate stance. An example of the latter is the CIE, which was established by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference in 1985 to address the needs of poorly-trained teachers in black schools, and which has evolved in many other directions also, working on projects in collaboration with national and regional government.

In this context, however, it is the advocacy role that is of interest. In the lead-up from 1994 to 1996 to the new Schools Act, which set the framework for the structure of contemporary schooling in South Africa, the CIE played a key and successful role in the definition of the sections of the act concerning church-run schools and continues to guard the interests of the Church in education. As Thantshi Serote, the deputy director, says

we made an input, and it was taken as is. ... From then onwards, we've really positioned ourselves to work in partnership with government. But the partnership I don't think compromises us. It allows us to be critical of government. Like right now, we are unhappy about the amendments to the education laws that will give lots of power to the Minister. ... So we criticize the government where it is necessary. We collaborate with them and we work with them. We have a very good relationship with government, to the extent that government sometimes calls upon CIE to be represented in key forums.

The organization thus feels itself to be a critical ally of government. While it is particularly concerned that the interests of the poorer Catholic schools be maintained and protected, its overall aim is to preserve the Catholic ethos in all kinds of church-run institutions. The intriguing aspect about this and other educational NGOs coming from a religious perspective is that however strongly allied they may be with government—as Thantshi Serote says, “Ideologically I think we were on the same track as the government that came into power”—the fact that they come from a perspective that is literally not of this world means that they do not have to struggle to maintain or justify their separate identity or interests. Their advocacy role is therefore clear. While they may be and are under pressure from donors to act in certain ways as far as their practical work is concerned, they are unlikely to compromise their basic religious interests. Existentially they contrast with some secular NGOs that operate in the same moral and practical universe as the new government, therefore finding it hard to find solid ground from which to interrogate and even criticize power.

Hemant Waghmarae of JET nicely sums up the delicate balance that he feels needs to be achieved in the question of advocacy. Like Project Literacy, JET is moving in a commercial direction without, its workers and promoters hope, losing its constructively critical edge. Until 1994 the stance of JET and other NGOs towards the government was largely adversarial. For two years or so thereafter, the attention of the new government was mainly absorbed by the huge task of restructuring that was required—a task that is by no means finished even now. In this context, organizations like JET largely stood aside to give the government room to maneuver. When new educational policies began to appear, the position of JET and others changed somewhat, and they felt able to interrogate and, where necessary, criticize the new policies. This is best illustrated in *Getting Learning Right*, an influential book published in 1999 under the aegis of JET (Taylor and Vinjefold: 1999).

JET's stance of constructive criticism has continued, especially with a constant insistence that without robust systems of appraisal, management, governance, and delivery, the new curriculum and other imaginative innovations simply will not work. The organization has moved “from adversarial mode to a supportive, collaborative role, [with] ... constructive criticism now and then.” However, there is, Waghmarae emphasizes, a fine line between being a critical friend and simply part of a support base.

In the often difficult environment for educational NGOs, many have nonetheless been able to voice reasoned policy critiques. The examples taken here have been Project Literacy and ABET; CIE and the issue of church-run schools; and JET and systems of appraisal, management,

governance, and delivery. Others have been mentioned in Chapter 4, Section 4. Though in the complex process of policy-making and implementation it is sometimes difficult to tease out the precise contribution of any one organization, such NGOs are confident that they have had real influence in areas that they can specify and that they have contributed to particular educational trajectories in their respective spheres of operation.

At another level, difficult to monitor because local events are varied and often unreported and may never impinge on national consciousness, there are local initiatives that implicitly and sometimes overtly make a case against neglect and marginalization. In education, two examples are the initiative by the KwaZulu-Natal branch of the Africa Cooperative Action Trust to produce a curriculum in adult education for the rural poor, an area that has received little or no official attention or funding, even after the passing of the Adult Basic Education and Training Act in 2000. In the Khayelitsha of Cape Town in January 2003, local activists organized the Masiphumele “community school” for students who for various reasons were unable to make use of their constitutional right to free education. Such local initiatives, which are to be found all over the country, attempt to provide badly-needed services and also constitute a form of advocacy.

## 7. Standing on their own Feet: South African NGOs and the Future

### Struggle NGOs and Commercial NGOs

The question of why “struggle” NGOs, those active in the anti-apartheid movement, have not flourished to the same extent as ones that were less close to the struggle is complex. On one level, South African politics in the 1980s and into the 1990s was structured along lines that, necessarily for the time and place, were caught in the harsh daily reality of political repression and resistance. In the world as a whole, especially with the fall of the Soviet Union and its allies, radical politics began to fracture and reform in new, loose coalitions within which the patterns are still not clear. Also, the boundaries between politics, which is typically represented by political movements and parties, and causes linked to issues such as human rights, cultural movements, the environment, gender, and so on, which are often the domain of NGOs, became increasingly blurred. Thus, on the macro-level, South African NGOs emerged from bitterly contested political conflict and had to start redefining themselves just when globally the very basis of radical thought and action was changing in unpredictable ways.

In South Africa before 1994, NGOs filled a very specific space. Bobby Soobrayan of the DOE, who himself made the transition from an educational NGO to government, characterizes the situation as follows. In the early to mid-1980s “institutions of alternative governance” began to develop. What he describes as “progressive NGOs” were repositories of people who, in any normal society, would have filled roles in government or administration. In fact, in many cases the NGOs were political bases, dealing both with the ostensible purpose of the organization in some aspect of education and with broader political work, often underground. These organizations were political spaces where such work could take place. With democratization, there was a mass exodus of such people into the political or state apparatus that was difficult or impossible in many cases for these NGOs to withstand. They were confronted with the question of what their role might be in the new dispensation now that their *raison d’être* seemed to have disappeared.

Bobby Soobrayan describes the situation in this way:

Partially, the apparent demise of these NGOs is because of this space being so radically redefined and somewhat disparate. I’m not saying confused, but fragmented. We had a unitary purpose prior to that. ... All of us understood clearly. We could communicate with each other in a narrative derived from the political conjuncture about what we [are] doing. So I could go into a health policy meeting and ... we’ll speak transformation, we’ll speak change, we’ll speak state power, and we’ll articulate that with what we’re doing immediately.

Thus between about 1990—when it began to become clear that real change was coming to South Africa—and approximately 1998, those NGOs that survived were involved in the difficult process of trying to define their new roles. This took the form of perennial strategic planning meetings and the like, in response to which a new breed of facilitators rapidly emerged. In short, the transition for NGOs of this sort was filled with self-doubt and with difficult questions of redefinition.

It would be an oversimplification to draw too stark a contrast between those NGOs that had been linked closely to the political struggle and those that were not. There were certainly many gradations, and particular NGOs did not always follow the general trend. Nevertheless, though



most educational NGOs came into conflict with the authorities to one degree or another, many attempted to work around if not within the existing system, and a broad distinction can be made between them and the struggle NGOs.

Such relatively nonpolitical NGOs were not, on the whole, sources for the new generation of government officials and politicians. While all NGOs had to reconsider their missions in the new context, it was in their case not generally necessary to reconceptualize so fundamentally. In other words, there was some continuity of personnel and aim. Also, though it would be difficult to demonstrate this in detail, it would seem that a greater proportion of the funding that had previously gone directly to the struggle NGOs was now diverted to the government than was the case with the less political organizations. In addition, the entrepreneurial spirit that was soon clearly required in the new context was perhaps less prevalent in the politically-oriented organizations than in the others.

From a different but complementary perspective, Andrew Miller of Project Literacy, which has made a wholehearted transition to the new, corporate world, notes the differing fates of NGOs in the sphere of ABET. During the past two years, perhaps 12 NGOs of the size of Project Literacy have closed: Learn and Teach, Izwe, the English Language Project, and others. They relied on donors for funding and did not, he suggests, make the switch to a more commercial orientation. Linked to this, they “were *more* politically correct, more rooted in the struggle. They are less good, I would argue, at delivery, but great at rhetoric. Teaching poor people that they are poor is a bit obvious.”

Of course, the division into “struggle” and what could be called “liberal” NGOs should not be pushed too far. Each institution had its own specific history, and it would be an exaggeration to divide them mechanically into struggle NGOs that failed to deal with the new circumstances from the mid-1990s and liberal ones that managed to survive because of their relative stability in terms of management, finances, and administration. There were some struggle NGOs from the 1980s that managed to adapt to the new circumstances and other NGOs grounded in what could be referred to as a “radical” paradigm that came into existence while the transition to nonracial democracy was already under way. Below are some portraits of particular educational NGOs that give a sense of how NGOs overall have thrived or declined over the past decade, while also illustrating the variety and unpredictability of individual cases.

### **Educational NGOs: Some Portraits**

An example of a struggle NGO that managed to survive into the present is the Joint Enrichment Project (JEP), studied in a recent thesis by Margaret Perrow (Perrow, 2002). This Soweto-based NGO went through a number of stages, one of them, Perrow argues, being in part that of vehicle for the liberation activities of its then director, Eric Molobi. However, in this case, largely through the acute strategies of Molobi and his successor, Sheila Sisulu, the organization managed to survive and even prosper to the present, changing focus and discourse from vocational to lifeskills training in a way that appeals to donors and that satisfies the perceived needs of the young people who are the beneficiaries.

NGOs that carried out educational research sometimes also made the transition from the 1980s effectively. Examples are the largely or completely self-supporting Education Policy Units (EPUs) housed at the universities of the Witwatersrand, Western Cape, Natal, Durban Westville, and Fort Hare. These bodies, based at “English” or historically black institutions of higher education, were formed in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the resistance mode of the time to develop a counter-analysis to prevailing South African educational thinking and practice. The Center for Education Policy Development (CEPD), which did not have a separate institutional

base but carried out a similar role, later joined this loose grouping. All these NGOs have survived, managing to maintain a critical edge while doing more contract work for government and other bodies than previously.

Another NGO that illustrates some specific aspects of the South African experience is the Education Foundation Trust (EFT). The EFT, like the EPU, is an educational research NGO that was set up in 1990 with the conscious intention of addressing needs that a liberated South Africa would face. The 18 separate education departments that the apartheid system had spawned were incapable of or unwilling to generate coherent statistics and documentation. The task that the EFT set itself was to attempt to compile and analyze whatever data could be gathered together as a means of creating the basis for rational educational planning. This led it directly into what the organization defines as its main area of competence, which is education management information systems.

The organization did not have an overtly political nature at first, and indeed this continued to be the case in formal terms. However, with majority rule, the EFT came to have a particularly close relationship with government, and became in fact a key organization in advising on the restructuring of the educational system at national and provincial levels. The EFT therefore acts almost as an arm of government, carrying out functions that in many ways can be seen as typical governmental responsibilities. Nonetheless, it is an independent body reliant on donors such as USAID, the Netherlands aid program, the EU, CIDA, Danida, and others.

The organization also does contract work. The heavy representation amongst its funders of official overseas donors is presumably an aspect of the strong relationship with government that finds expression in the willingness of other governments to support this favored child. Lindani Mthethwa, the technical manager, notes how South African conditions have influenced the form of EFT. "It lies with the history. ... We were established as an NGO, and ... I think it also lies with grants and donors." They were caught up in helping the country, and never really thought of changing, being comfortable as an NGO. "It still serves our main client, which in this case is the DOE, and it still serves our main grantees and donors."

Independence such as this for the gathering of information that would more typically be a function of government is perhaps unusual, but it serves its purpose. Donors are happy to fund a body that works flexibly and produces excellent results without some of the bureaucratic procedures that are a part of government.

EFT is an NGO that sees itself as critical but that operates predominantly in collaboration with the structures of governance. Lindani Mthethwa says:

We work in accordance with opportunities to become members of structures that make decisions. One has this ... role ... of criticizing in a democratic way within a structure, such as when a decision comes out. It's more like a decision that has gone through a serious process, and ... you are able to make your input and your decision becomes their decision. ... The organization actually runs away from being an opposition.

The particular technocratic area within which EFT operates makes its close relationship with government rational and productive. Nevertheless, this may be another and different sort of model of NGO-government relations—a sort of informal incorporation with the status of NGO derived from administrative and financial convenience and representing a space for concentration on what the organization does well. It is a long way from the vehement and irreconcilable

opposition that characterized many NGOs in the 1980s. It is also different from the advocacy role that is a characteristic of many NGOs. Some NGOs describe their relationship with government as more than a partnership, which does not compromise their independence and is compatible with a critical attitude where necessary. Again, it contrasts with an organization like Project Literacy, for instance, which has gone far down the commercial road, but is not so decisively within the ambit of the state. Perhaps EDT could be described as an NGO verging on an informal parastatal organization.

The South African Committee for Higher Education Development (SACHED), founded by Anne Yates in 1959 in the wake of the Bantu Education Act, was a highly significant organization amongst educational NGOs in the apartheid period. Using a loophole in the law, the intention behind SACHED was to set up individual tutorials that would guide black pupils through British O and A level examinations in preparation for supported correspondence courses for University of London external degrees. With the tacit support of the ANC, SACHED expanded its activities into many cognate educational areas, for instance publishing important alternative educational texts and becoming a major critical force in alternative South African education. Numerous black students, including Thabo Mbeki, now President of South Africa, benefited from the support that SACHED offered.

Although in 1994 funding that had previously come from the Kellogg Foundation, Swiss Aid, USAID, and elsewhere dried up, SACHED still survives. Large numbers of SACHED people left for government. Its director became the head of the ANC education desk, and more recently of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, an important contemporary educational NGO. Ex-SACHED employees launched several other NGOs. Some 250 people were retrenched and SACHED itself limped through the next few years. A new director, Jenny Rabinowitz, was appointed in 1997, and she was obliged to shut down division after division of the organization.

Currently, SACHED is operating in the area of ABET, producing teaching materials and outsourcing teachers for companies, which pay for the service, and also working in very poor areas such as Orange Farm in Johannesburg, where funding is always problematic. It is no discredit on its valuable work to say that SACHED is a shadow of its former self and that it did not weather the transition of the early and mid-1990s very smoothly. Though it is now oriented towards ABET service delivery, it is not one of the major players in this area.

The Molteno Trust has different origins and recent history. It is an example of an NGO that attempted under apartheid, in the interests of its work, to remain as apolitical as was possible in that testing context. The Molteno Project was named after the trust that was its initial and major backer, which was itself an offshoot of a family that was at the forefront of the Cape liberal tradition since well back into the 19th century.

The Molteno Project was founded in 1975 by Professor Len Lanham at Rhodes University, the smallest of the “English” universities of South Africa, in the Eastern Cape town of Grahamstown. In 1994 Molteno became an autonomous Section 21 company and moved its headquarters to Johannesburg. The Molteno Project’s *raison d’être* was the high failure rate of black matriculants. This, Lanham and others argued, was in essence a problem with its roots in language and literacy, and the crucial factor in the search for a solution was literacy in the child’s home language in the early years of education. Initially, a British literacy program, *Breakthrough to Literacy*, was adapted to suit South African conditions, specifically for Xhosa-language speakers in the Eastern Cape. The organization began to research language acquisition and literacy in the local situation and embarked on a program of developing teaching materials and methods from grades 1 to 6.

The Molteno Project worked where it could with the existing authorities, not wishing to sacrifice black school-children in the interests of purist opposition to the regime. As the homeland policy, an attempt to Balkanise black African society on an ethnic basis, was implemented, Molteno followed where possible into the schools of these impoverished areas. Molteno's materials and methods were widely utilized in homelands such as Bophuthatswana—where it operated in all 17 educational districts and in over 100 schools in the homeland—and in Lebowa, Venda, and elsewhere. It also worked in black townships controlled by those considered by many to be stooges of apartheid. Towards the end of the apartheid era, the Molteno Project's materials were in the official catalogue of the DET, the body responsible for black schools in "white" South Africa outside the homelands, for these schools to utilize if they wished.

After 1994, some saw Molteno as subservient to the old regime since it had worked in and with the homelands, and this caused difficulties at times with the new authorities. However, the quality of Molteno's materials and trainers, and the fact that whatever was tried in their place seemed less effective, has led to the reestablishment of much of the organization's earlier significance. While relations with national government appear not to be particularly close, the project works in cooperation with provinces like the Free State and Limpopo.

Across South Africa's borders, Molteno's program has been adopted nationally in Botswana—an interesting development when it is considered that Molteno was particularly entrenched in the similarly Tswana-speaking Bophuthatswana homeland—and the Project also works in other African countries. There is no doubt that language education policy, with increasing emphasis on mother-tongue instruction, especially in the early years of schooling, is moving in the direction followed over many years by Molteno. The project has survived several difficult years, and is now expanding steadily with a greater emphasis than previously on cost-recovery and sales.

### **Commercialization of Educational NGOs**

The educational NGOs that have made the transition to the new South African environment most successfully seem to have been those that have thoroughly embraced the new atmosphere of financial accountability, service provision, and commercial effectiveness. It has been seen that in this context some donor organizations, like Kagiso and JET discussed above, have moved in the direction of themselves becoming in effect money-generating businesses. There has been a certain convergence with some of the more successful educational NGOs, which are also becoming more like businesses and are selling their services effectively while attempting to retain their focus on community service and development.

Project Literacy, the largest South African NGO devoted to ABET, is a good example of these tendencies towards a new kind of semi-corporate NGO identity. The organization was founded in 1973 by a group of liberal white women in Pretoria who, for the first 10 years of its existence, concentrated on teaching domestic workers to read and write. After expanding from that base over the years of apartheid, with the beginning of the political transition in 1990 and particularly with the coming of majority rule in 1994, Project Literacy found itself in the situation characteristic of many NGOs, dependent on declining donor grants and needing to redefine its role in the new dispensation.

Project Literacy did, however, have a good record of frugality, hard work, and dependability. In this it was similar to other NGOs that had the sometimes ambiguous advantage of coming not directly from a revolutionary "struggle" tradition, but rather from that of liberal commitment to improvement and advancement. In the polarized environment of the 1980s, even this stance could lead to ideological and practical clashes with the regime, for instance with raids after-hours on

premises in officially “white” areas where black students were studying when the law said they should have been back in the townships.

Given the realities of South African class and race, NGOs such as Project Literacy tended to have access to a body of financial and administrative expertise and a tradition (as far as was possible in the South Africa of the time) of relatively apolitical middle-class voluntary service. Handled intelligently, this ethos could bridge the divide between the heroic days of the 1980s and the increasingly insistent demands in the 1990s and thereafter for financial accountability and for structures that would provide measurable results, or “deliverables,” in the jargon of the day. Ironically, it was the struggle NGOs that came with radical political credentials, but not always with a strong record of educational delivery or financial and administrative expertise, that tended to wilt first in the new atmosphere.

Project Literacy, then, is an excellent example of a body that has transformed itself into a thoroughly professional organization while taking the decision to remain an NGO. The crucial factor was the board, chaired by prominent lawyer and businessman Dikgang Moseneke. Project Literacy was already successful in terms of donor assistance, in particular having had grants amounting to R38 million from JET, making it that organization’s biggest recipient of support. However, the board and management attempted to read the situation not as it was but as it was becoming, and Project Literacy changed its management style, raised salaries for staff, and let go many who could not or did not wish to adapt to the new regime. In Andrew Miller’s words, the organization “became very action-output oriented.” “We’re not too good on workshops,” he says, “but we’re very good on delivery.” There was a partial move away from actual teaching, and the production of good-quality teaching materials was emphasized. Direct in-house production was reduced, and materials production was outsourced to the best authors and illustrators available. Project Literacy ceased to itself directly produce the books and other materials for which it is well-known, and instead entered into a partnership with Maskew Miller Longman, a major South African publisher.

The organization continues to teach both the poor and underprivileged for which service donor funding is obtained and the employees of companies that pay well for the service. To a large extent this is also done by out-sourcing. Andrew Miller says it is “quite a chameleon-like game.” He cites the big U.S. NGOs whom he says are “very good chameleons ... and they compete against private people for jobs.” In his view, given the realities of South Africa and the world, this outsourcing is the way forward.

There are also initiatives across the NGO sector to generate income by means of commercial and investment activities. It remains to be seen whether these will be as successful as focussed commercial initiatives by particular educational NGOs that have a product to sell and a market to which they can address themselves.

### **South African Educational NGOs in Africa**

The more successful South African educational NGOs differ in important ways from the norm in other parts of Africa, as well as from smaller and less professional South African organizations. They have substantial domestic sources of income. They rely less on overseas funding than do those in other parts of Africa. They are larger and, though it would be wrong to generalize too emphatically on this point, possibly in many cases have better management capacity than those elsewhere. And they have often built strong and apparently enduring professional relationships with government.

Some radical analyses would have seen South Africa, possibly even now, as representing a bastion of capitalism in Africa, while at the same time being a sub-metropole with its own interests vis-à-vis the western world. No doubt this is an oversimplification. Nevertheless, the NGO sector in South Africa appears to share the spirit of South African companies and entrepreneurs who are currently carving out export and investment opportunities across the continent. Many of the most vigorous South African educational NGOs, like the most enterprising companies, are expanding “into Africa,” ironically a phrase that many South Africans still use.

As we have seen, the funding of South African educational NGOs comes from a number of sources, including domestic corporate donations and increasingly from the sale of materials and services. In their relationship with the rest of Africa, however, the NGOs interviewed for this research all take a commercial view. The recipients elsewhere benefit from the accumulated experience of the South African organizations, but they pay for this as they would pay for services from a commercial company. Recipient countries may or may not generate funds from donors so as to employ South African NGOs, but the South African NGOs themselves treat the transaction as a commercial one and do not expend their own resources on these enterprises, unless it is to explore the market or to attempt to get donors to fund them.

Some examples will add substance to this theme. Project Literacy, whose commercial orientation has already been discussed, has grasped the commercial route with both hands. As the director puts it, “Part of our strategic plan is to become a sub-Saharan player, because I want to be *us* there as South Africans rather than pale Pommies driving around in Oxfam jeeps.” As he told the board of his organization, “If we can sell South African Breweries to Africa, then why can’t we sell Project Literacy?” Project Literacy has spent two-and-a-half years exploring the possibilities, supported by the New Zealand High Commission, and working through local NGOs, “so we wouldn’t be Cecil John Rhodes, we wouldn’t be Oxfam.” They found wherever they went, including Mozambique, that there was an insistent demand for literacy in English. Already they have produced materials for Botswana, Namibia, Kenya, and Mozambique. Project Literacy staff have been sent to study Portuguese so as to facilitate work in Mozambique.

The Molteno Project, which works with mother-tongue literacy, is also growing north of South Africa’s borders at the invitation of countries where the reputation of the “Breakthrough to Literacy” materials had spread. These materials have been introduced nationally in schools in Botswana where material in Setswana, which is also a South African language, could be easily used, as is similarly the case with Sesotho materials in Lesotho. Materials have also been translated and adapted for use in languages in Namibia, Zambia, and Uganda, and there have even been preliminary approaches from Mali and Ethiopia.

JET Education Services is working in the SADC region and in Ghana. Ghana has a long history of first-rate education, but recurring economic and political crises have led high-level personnel who would be well capable of carrying out excellent educational research to seep away, thus opening opportunities for organizations such as JET. This example illustrates South Africa’s different trajectory to many other African countries, even ones as comparatively developed in educational terms as Ghana.

The educational research NGO, the Education Foundation Trust, has also made a conscious decision to extend its work outside South Africa’s borders, especially into the SADC region. As its director says, “at the heart of everything, it’s for us to see Africa develop.” She herself is a Swazi, indicating that the traffic in people and ideas is not all one way.

The Independent Examinations Board sells its examinations in Zambia, Swaziland, and Mozambique, and is looking at opportunities in Malawi. Some of the Education Policy Units, which represent a type of educational research NGOs, are carrying out educational research in collaboration with organizations in other parts of Africa, reaching as far as West Africa.

Even what could be called para-educational NGOs are working in other parts of Africa. For example, personnel from Soul City, the health and HIV/AIDS education organization that uses drama and entertainment media to spread its message, are acting as technical advisors in countries, such as Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and others, wishing to mount television programs similar to the extremely popular South African models.

There are many fascinating aspects to this growing South African involvement in Africa to the north of its borders, in the NGO sphere as in others. It is a phenomenon that has received surprisingly little academic attention, perhaps because it cuts across the pessimistic economic and social discourse that is currently almost the norm in the country. For present purposes, the point to emphasize is that though the NGO sector may in some senses feel itself to be in a long hangover after the heroic days of the 1980s, many South African educational NGOs are advancing from their role as service providers within South Africa and are vigorously engaging with the rest of the continent. They are doing this with little of the at least ostensible angst and self-doubt that sometimes characterize metropolitan NGOs.

### **A Complex Future?**

The picture emerging from this report is that for educational NGOs the perhaps surprising outcome of 10 years of democracy is a decline in direct donor funding with a corresponding emphasis on commercial success, mainly through a stress on service delivery. There is also the demise of many NGOs, a move away from the critical advocacy that many would see as central to the role of NGOs in a vibrant civil society, and a new entrepreneurial role, including the export of skills and services to other parts of Africa.

Is this the full picture? Now that NGOs may be forced or willing converts to commercial norms with less donor support than previously, are they now locked in a service-delivery embrace with government? Has the commitment to radical critique that was so central to the earlier history of the sector evaporated?

Perhaps not. There are indications that after a period of painful change a new pattern of NGOs is emerging. These may range from organizations barely distinguishable from commercial operations, through hybrid entities using whatever noncommercial resources they can generate to stake out a degree of independence, to bodies reminiscent of Korten's "third-generation" NGOs that concentrate on articulating various often dissenting and critical positions in the new context (Korten: 1987). In the latter category, the Treatment Action Campaign working for the interests of those afflicted with the HIV virus, is prominent. In education, the recently-founded Education Rights Project plays an analogous role. There are also analogous local initiatives, as has been seen in Chapter 6. What the relative importance of these elements within the sector will be is yet to be determined. Certainly for a healthy democracy, critical advocacy and efficient and professional service provision are crucial.

## 8. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Analytical and policy implications emerge from this report. This section will highlight some of the explicit and implicit implications of the text and add a little more in terms of policy. Since this report has been commissioned by donors, there will be a particular emphasis on policy as it relates to donors.

### Analytical Findings

- South Africa has had an exceptional modern history. Therefore, it will help to avoid errors of perspective if in analyzing South African educational NGOs the history of the society and of the NGO sector within the society is examined carefully. NGOs have developed in a way that is in some respects not typical of the rest of the continent, though, in spite of obvious differences in scale, comparisons with Namibia and Zimbabwe might be instructive and yield closer parallels. South African NGOs have a history of independence and assertiveness stemming from the apartheid past and are often both socially and financially deeply rooted in local areas. On the other hand, since 1994 many have struggled to clarify their roles in the context of the political and social changes that have brought a government into power claiming to represent the very aims for which many NGOs would assert that they stand.
- South Africa is a large, varied, and by African standards, wealthy country, though this wealth is very unevenly distributed. South Africa is itself a regional metropole. Therefore a metropole-periphery model of dominant foreign and impoverished and vulnerable local NGOs is not appropriate to the South African case. Funding from government, the domestic corporate sector, and international sources are all potentially available to the NGO sector.
- Stemming from the above, the expansion of many of the more successful educational NGOs into other parts of Africa is noteworthy. It is also a phenomenon that has received no scholarly attention.
- The large international NGOs that are often such important players in other African countries are relatively insignificant in South Africa. In this respect the NGO-government-donor nexus in South Africa is different in substantial ways from that in many other African countries.
- Similarly, while foreign donors are important in South Africa, they are by no means predominant. There is a sizeable “indigenous” donor community, largely corporate. While such donors of course have their own agendas, their physical and politico-economic location does differentiate them from external funders.
- In general, for financial reasons and also to some extent because of the marked change in the political landscape, NGOs in their role as service providers have moved closer to government since 1994. However, in government as amongst NGOs themselves, there is some interrogation of this relationship, and it would not be true to say that government in all cases takes a crudely instrumental line in relation to the sector. Many within government were formed politically and ideologically within NGOs, and are sympathetic with their role, or potential role, as “critical friends.” It can thus be said that while there is



a marked general shift towards a narrowly defined contractual relationship between government and educational NGOs, amounting at times to a master-servant relationship, a more critical “advocacy” stance, which at least sometimes may be actually welcomed by government, is not excluded in all cases.

### **Implications for Policy**

One of the findings of this report is that the history and current position of educational NGOs is complex, with many cross-cutting and in some ways contradictory aspects. Nevertheless, there are certain broad tendencies that can be discerned that may point the way towards policy commitments by donors, government, and NGOs themselves.

Many African countries are highly impoverished and the state is the cockpit for sometimes vicious conflict over scarce resources. Thus, even when formal democratic processes have taken place, fragile but often authoritarian states embroiled in the struggle for wealth and privilege appear to have largely ceased to respond to the voices of their citizens. On the other hand various bodies such as churches, trade unions, and an independent media, while they are not directly elected by the mass of the citizenry, do in aggregate comprise a sector that economically supports individuals who are not financially or intellectually beholden to the state. This sector provides the material and intellectual base for the independent and when necessary critical voices without which, it is suggested, pluralistic modern democracies cannot exist. NGOs are an important part of this “civil society.”

Therefore, if donors regard the support of independent critical educational voices as important as a starting principle, *educational NGOs, and NGOs in general, should be regarded sympathetically in terms of funding and support.*

The independent economic base for NGOs and other institutions of civil society is more robust in South Africa than elsewhere on the continent. Nevertheless, as recounted in this report, the ironical result of the accession to power of a democratically elected regime is that its very legitimacy has led to the diversion of funding from the NGO sector directly to the government. Typically, funding now comes to educational NGOs through the “service provider” role. This is a legitimate and necessary function, but does lead to direct dependence on government and a limitation of the critical “advocacy” that is crucial to the creativity and independence of the sector. Thus, whilst maintaining rigorous norms of financial accountability, to maintain the independent and critical role of educational NGOs, *donors should allocate sufficient funding for NGOs not only to implement specific educational projects, but also to support institutional survival and critical, independent educational inquiry and reflection.*

Though there are many variations between different NGOs, the paradox is generally true and recognized by some voices within government, that taken overall South African educational NGOs are weaker now than they were in the apartheid period. In international terms, because of the political context, donors in the apartheid and transitional periods were unusually tolerant of relatively loose financial controls and ideologically-driven agendas. They have now become more commercial and results-oriented in approach. Educational NGOs have made the painful adjustments demanded by these changes in the funding landscape. Where they have not, they have often not survived. In spite of this major transformation in educational NGOs in tune with government—and donor—requirements, and in spite of assurances that government values this sector, the actual level of governmental support has been and continues to be unsatisfactory. This is shown by, for instance, the history of the National Development Agency, the government-sponsored body intended, *inter alia*, to support NGOs.

It is therefore important that *there should be a clear voice in favor of public support for reputable educational NGOs, and that this support, though initiated by government, should be structured so as to be independent and nonparty political.*

Partly stemming from the funding problems noted above, it is clear that there is a crisis of capacity in many educational NGOs, as there is in the educational system as a whole. Through a combination of action within NGOs and support for capacity development from without, for instance, by support for organizational development that would provide a degree of institutional security and continuity, it will be necessary to *act to break the cycle of inadequate capacity, which otherwise could lead to a downward spiral of mediocrity.*

Nonetheless, there is a great variety of educational NGOs in South Africa that have many different origins, roles, and characteristics, and that have different relations with the state, donors, and their support-bases. Similarly, “government” is a complex and varied entity, involved in a many-sided process of engagement, co-option, and accommodation. Donors also are a multifarious group.

Therefore it is not easy to make clear generalizations in particular about donor roles vis-à-vis educational NGOs. There is no single template that is easy to apply. The implication is that *donors should examine each interaction carefully and avoid a priori assumptions about NGOs or government.*

In spite of the problems noted above, a rapidly growing and innovative aspect of many of the most successful South African educational NGOs is that they increasingly operate in a regional and even continental context. This would seem to offer many benefits both to these NGOs and to educational development in the rest of Africa. It should also serve as a way for South Africa to learn from its northern neighbors from whom the country was separated by apartheid for many years.

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### **List of Interviewees**

1. Patience Lekganyane (Manager: Admin. and Human Resources) and Paula Gains, Molteno Project, Johannesburg. 24 July 2002.
2. Joel Sebolao (Divisional Manager), Soul City, Johannesburg. 24 July 2002.
3. Jenny Rabinowitz (CEO) SACHED, Johannesburg. 25 July 2002.
4. Kashief Lombard, USAID, Pretoria. 25 July 2002.
5. Sharanjeet Shan (Executive Director), Mathematics Center for Professional Development, Johannesburg. 26 July 2002.
6. Lyn Scott (Chief Executive Officer), Independent Examinations Board, Johannesburg. 26 July 2002.
7. Hemant Waghmarae (Divisional Manager), Joint Education Trust, Johannesburg. 26 July 2002.
8. Lungi Mathole, SANGOCO, Pretoria. 29 July 2002.
9. Thantsi Serote (Departmental Director) and Marlene Jardine (Developmental Officer), Catholic Institution of Education, Johannesburg. 29 July 2002.
10. Lomthie Mavimbela (CEO), Lindani Mthethwa (Technical Manager), and Derrick Pavaday (Corporate Services Manager), Education Foundation Trust, Johannesburg. 30 July 2002.
11. Andrew Miller (Chief Executive Officer), Project Literacy, Pretoria. 8 August 2002.
12. Duncan Hindle (DDG for General Education and Training), Department of Education, Pretoria. 16 August 2002.
13. Bobby Soobrayan (DDG for Planning and Monitoring), Department of Education, Pretoria. 25 September 2002.