

**THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (NGO's)  
IN EDUCATIONAL ADVANCEMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES:  
THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE**

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**1. A Working Definition of a 'Non-governmental Organisation'**

In my discussion I shall use the phrase *Non-governmental Organisation* (NGO) to mean any grouping of people who have a common mission to meet a particular need in their society or community, and are not formed or controlled by government. Throughout the world groups of people identify needs in their communities which government institutions are either not designed to meet or which government institutions are unable to meet because of the unavailability of resources, and the government having other priorities. This is particularly the case in poor countries. It does, however, happen that private citizens are compelled to organize themselves to meet certain needs because government is not willing to address these needs, even where resources may be available. This happens in oppressive regimes and dictatorships of various kinds. So, an NGO may address a need which is normally not a concern of government, but it frequently happens that NGOs address needs which in a normal society should be addressed by government. My country will serve as example where private citizens mobilized themselves to serve their fellow citizens because the government was not willing to meet the needs of the people. This happened during the apartheid days. The days when the government was racist and discriminatory in its allocation of the resources of the country.

A further characteristic of NGOs is that in most cases they depend on donations for the resources required to perform their functions. The donations may come from the community, from businesses, from the government of the country in which the NGO operates, or from foreign governments, foundations and businesses.

For an NGO to be able to collect donations from the general public there must be a certain measure of financial viability in some section of that community. The section of the community with financial viability must be sympathetic to the needs of that section which needs the service being provided by the NGO. In South Africa there was a

measure of this cross subsidization of communities. During the Apartheid regime, white people were generally financially well-off, while black people were generally poor. This was because of the job reservation laws which were meant to give advantage to white people, and keep black people poor. There were a few white people who showed sympathy for those NGO's that tried to provide black people with those services which the government deliberately denied black people.

The contribution by a government to an NGO's material needs can only happen where there is a friendly relationship between government and the NGO. This happens where the government wishes to channel its resources into work of more urgent need, but the government is prepared to have an NGO, or a number of NGO's take care of those needs which the government cannot fully pay attention to at that particular time. This is happening in South Africa now after a non-racial democratic government has been elected. The government is willing, and tries, to provide for all the needs of the population for which government is normally responsible. The government is, however, burdened with the deliberate impoverishment of the majority of communities by the apartheid regime. Consequently, the government is unable to satisfy all the needs of the people. The poorest still appear to have gained nothing from having a democratically elected government. This may create a negative sentiment towards the government and lead to revolt. A determined participation by NGO's to support the government in its delivery of services could protect the newly found democracy.

Earlier I mentioned that there was a deliberate impoverishment of the black communities by the apartheid regime. Because of that impoverishment of the black community, it has become necessary that funding of NGO work be sourced from outside South Africa, from international companies, foundation and governments. In fact, during apartheid the bulk of the money needed for conducting the work of NGO's came from outside South Africa. American and European foundations, churches, corporations and governments provided the resources required to do a wide variety of NGO work, ranging from education, feeding the poor to defending those who were facing political trials as well as looking after the families of those who could not provide for their families because they were imprisoned or banned for their political activities.

## **2. A Brief General History of NGO's in South Africa**

South Africa has a history that is strongly influenced by racial prejudice and

discrimination. Before the non-radical democratic elections of 1994 many institutions, which could have developed for different reasons in other societies, were motivated in South Africa by a response to racial discrimination. It was a response to deprivation resulting from the racially biased allocation of resources by the apartheid government. This is evident in virtually every walk of life in South Africa. In health there is a history of NGO's providing health services to those communities that the government chose to deprive of proper health services. An example is the Zanempilo clinic in the Eastern Cape Province which was built and run by the late Stive Biko and Dr Mamphela. Another effort in the provision of health was the mobile clinics of the Black Community Programmes (BCP) which was a project of the Black Peoples Convention. This project comprised trailers which were equipped with medical instrument which volunteer doctors could use to help poor communities who were not provided for by the government. These efforts in providing medical care for the poor became necessary because the apartheid government, while providing excellent medical care for white people, completely ignored the poor who happened to be black.

In 1913 the South African white government legislated that black people could own only thirteen percent(13%) of the land. This led to great suffering and starvation, especially among rural people. Rural black people were compelled by this legislation to work for white farmers at wages so low that the rural black people were almost kept in slavery. This brought about the rise of NGO's which concerned themselves with the acquisition and proper working of rural land by the black population, as well as providing emergency food relief for poor rural communities. Many of these NGO's did a lot of advocacy work, making appeals even to the oppressive apartheid government to give relief to the rural population, and urging international companies, foundations and foreign governments to help with alleviating the plight of the rural black population. One such NGO, which looked after the interest of the black rural population was the Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC) which did all the types of work I have mentioned with respect to land related NGO's. It was because of the work done by TRAC that the rural poor were not forgotten.

Another fact of life which needed intervention was child care. Children whose parents were unable to care for were totally neglected. This gave rise to a population of the so-called "street children", who lived a life of crime in the streets of the cities. In Johannesburg a former mayor who was sympathetic to plight of the children established the Johannesburg Child Welfare Society. As an extension of the

Johannesburg Child Welfare Society, a home for orphanage and abandoned African children who needed to be cared for was established in 1940 at Orland in Soweto, a residential area for black people in South West of the city of Johannesburg. The name of the children's home is the Orland Children's Home. However, the Johannesburg Child Welfare Society abandoned support of this children's home in 1976, claiming that there was a shortage of money to run the children's home.

A group of Soweto residents took over the children's home and continued operating it as an independent non-governmental organization set up to care for children in need of care. I am mentioning this child care NGO at such length because at a very difficult time in its history the Consulate of Japan in Pretoria, South Africa, came to the aid of this organization, and gave valuable support. The Japanese government still continues to give support from time to time, enabling the Orland Children's Home to do the very important work of looking after orphaned and abandoned children. I have spoken to the director of the *Orland Children's Home* before coming to Japan, and said I must express her sincerest gratitude to the people of Japan, who through their Consul General and diplomatic staff in Pretoria have given tremendous help to needy South African children.

### **3. Educational NGO's**

The development and operation NGO's in South Africa and the operation of international NGO's in South Africa is very closely linked to the political history of South Africa. By 1912 when the United of South Africa was established, South Africa had evolved politically as a racially segregate and discriminatory country. When the 1912 constitution came into effect, black people were not given any political rights. They could not vote or participate in any political institutions with the white people. Education was also already segregated. The government provided education for white people in state run schools. No provision was made for the indigenous people. A few were tolerated in the schools set up by government for whites, but the majority had to be catered for by various religious organizations – that is, non-governmental organizations. So, from early this century until 1953, almost all education for the African population of South Africa was provided by non-governmental organizations. The Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church were the main providers of education for Africans in South Africa. Other churches also made important contributions.

In 1953 the white supremacist South African government of the time passed the so-called Bantu Education Act. This was a law which put all education of black people under the control of the government. The notorious Dr Hendrik Verwoerd who was then minister of Bantu Affairs, a department meant to be in charge of the control of black people, had formulated a philosophy called *apartheid* as a way of keeping the races apart and the white people in control. Education was one of the instruments of control that he identified. His staff formulated a brand of education called Bantu Education whose aim was to make black people submissive and half educated. This intention to provide an inferior education for the African population in South Africa was made clear in a document published by a white supremacist cultural group in November 1949. The passing of the Bantu Education Act was the beginning in South Africa of the era of educational NGO's set up specifically to oppose the educational policies of the South African government. It was also a time when international NGO's involved in education began to pay attention to South Africa. Some managed to get into South Africa to engage in anti-apartheid educational work, but the majority found it difficult. The apartheid government gradually made it difficult for foreign organizations to operate within South Africa.

When the Bantu Education Act was passed the immediate response of African people was to resist going to the schools established or taken over by the government. The so-called *Night Schools* movement in the African townships began. This involved setting up night schools to teach African children in accordance with the curriculum. The government moved swiftly to arrest the leaders of these night schools, who were in the main ANC political activists. This crack down by the government caused the collapse of the night schools movement. This was a defeat for the first resistance educational NGO's. For almost two decades there was no significant educational NGO work at school level. The only NGO work which thrived between 1953 and 1973 was the granting of bursaries and scholarships by both South African and international NGO's. The African Bursary Fund and many other NGO's sought to put as many African young people through the school system as possible. The view was that some education, no matter how bad, is better than no education at all. As the saying goes: "Half a loaf is better than no bread at all."

The next step in the apartheid government's quest for the control of the minds of African people was the passing of the Extension of Universities Act in the early 1960's. This law dictated that no black person could be admitted into any of the universities of Bantu Education. Separate universities for black people were established. These institutions

were obviously meant to be of inferior quality. Certain studies, such as engineering, agriculture and medicine which were important for development were not included in these segregated universities.

The passing of the Extension of Universities Act provoked the establishment of NGOs aimed at resisting this law. One such NGO is the South Africa Students' Opportunity to Study for Degrees with London University, by distance learning. A number of South Africans managed to obtain B. Sc(Economics) degrees from London University. However as the effects of Bantu Education began to show in students coming from the high schools ill-prepared to cope with a demanding university programme, SACHED was compelled to include in its programme a high school programme which was meant to bridge the gap between the Bantu Education matriculation qualification and the requirements of London University or any university for that matter. SACHED provided both bursaries and tuition for those students who wished to go through the high school programme and then to the London University programme. As the years went by, SACHED had to shift its stance of not providing tuition towards a South African qualification to acknowledging that the problem was so massive that a compromise had to be struck. A South African high school examination regarded as being of the best quality, the Joint Matriculation Board (JMB) examination was later chosen for the preparation of African students who then went on to take degree studies of the University of South Africa.

In its funding SACHED was an example of very strong international support. SACHED received funding from a very wide variety of international NGOs such as the World University Service, foundations, church organizations and governments.

There is no doubt that SACHED offered an opportunity for black South Africans to make progress in education despite the attempt by the then apartheid government to restrict and exclude blacks from mainstream education.

Until 1976 SACHED was virtually alone in providing an alternative route to academic qualification for black South Africans. SACHED did its work through offices in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and East London. After the student revolution of 1976 there was greater focus on South Africa by international NGOs, foundations and governments. Some offered financial help to enable black South Africans to study at South African schools and universities. There were also NGOs as well as foundations

which offered black South Africans bursaries and scholarships to study at universities in Europe and in the United States of America. It soon became apparent that there was a need for providing black South Africans with work experience outside South Africa, because it was not easy for black graduates to find jobs. And when they eventually found jobs they were alleged to be incompetent because of lack of work experience. International NGO's such as Africare of the USA designed programmes aimed at giving opportunities to black South Africans to do internships in the professions for which they had qualified at University.

An examination of the incumbents in many government and private sector jobs will show that if the incumbent is black he/she most likely studied in Europe or the United States, and got work experience through the help of such NGO's as Africare and the Institute for International Education(IIE).

After 1976 people in South Africa became bolder in establishing and running educational NGO's. There was a feeling of urgency about getting more black South Africans to get some qualification. It was as if people were anticipating that there would soon be a great need for South Africans with good qualifications. A major thrust in international cooperation in the provision of tertiary education for South Africans came with the establishment of an educational NGO called the Education Opportunities Council(EOC). This NGO recruited black South African students for American universities. The universities took on these students without asking for fees, or took them on and raised funds from corporations to pay for these South African students. The EOC has been going on for more than fifteen years now.

Another major development in the provision of education for black people took place in May 1988, when Ford Motor Company of Canada made a grant to the Trust for Educational Advancement in South Africa (TEASA). TEASA was set up to provide educational development for those people who were disadvantaged by the apartheid regime. In the past eleven years TEASA has supported NGO's in Adult Basic Education and Training(ABET), and Mathematics, Science and Technology (MST) teacher development. TEASA has also provided bursaries and scholarships for tertiary students in science, engineering and technology and in commerce. These efforts have given South Africa a big boost in its chances of developing into a positive force for the industrial and financial development of the Southern African region of Africa. The human resources provided by these efforts could never have been developed under the apartheid system.

This would have made the defense of democracy in South Africa even more difficult than it is now.

To ensure that South Africa remains on course in its attempts to develop a viable democracy, it is necessary that the international cooperation that I have mentioned be expanded and strengthened by the participation of more developed countries such as Japan. Partnerships of different kinds could be struck between NGO's in Japan and NGO's in South Africa to transfer expertise from Japan to South Africa that will make South Africa a worthy economic partner as countries in the world become closer and closer into one global village. This is a challenge that I believe should be made to all developed countries. The security of the world cannot be guaranteed unless the developing countries are assisted educationally to evolve well thought out systems of providing for their populations and participating rationally in the global economy.

I thank you for listening to me. I hope I have thrown some light on how the NGO system in my county has evolved, and how it is likely to develop in the future.