

A new age of social movements: a fifth generation of non- governmental development organisations in the making?

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Introduction

It is easier to write about what to do than to do it. Writing does not require courage, but courage can be needed for action ... [and action] involves conflicts of interest where the weak are dominated, exploited and cheated by the powerful ... There are times for confrontation and big reversal: there are critical periods when small pushes can move major decisions, resources or systems one way or another: but most common are the times for patient work on small things. (Chambers, 1983: 193 and 216)

What we have in common with the situation in the developing countries is that in both cases the interests of the majority are disregarded ... while the interests of a minority are strongly promoted ... The political roots and mechanisms of such parallel situations, where a minority manages to make its interests prevail over those of a majority, show close similarities between the developing and industrial countries. (Singer, 1988: 2-3)

How can NGOs remain independent and radical in their approaches and avoid being 'sucked into the system'? (Harris, in Poulton and Harris (eds), 1988:5)

Non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs) have now peaked in their reputation as credible channels for 'delivering social development' to the most needy, and as agents who can mobilise ordinary people around challenging the forces that are blocking the fight

against the poverty to which large sectors of the world's population are condemned to live. Despite many critical — and perhaps more balanced — studies on the practical effectiveness of NGOs (and particularly Northern agencies), their supposed capacity to act as social and educational catalysts of public opinion remains almost unchallenged: it is simply assumed that they have the potential to propose a new paradigm in North–South relations. Hence, it is important to pull together our accumulated knowledge as well as subjecting this area of work to systematic evaluation.

Such evaluation is even more vital in a period of economic crisis and budget cuts such as we are now facing, when an implicit 'pact of silence' could be forged between bilateral and multilateral donors and NGOs — a mutually beneficial pact in which NGOs are so keen to maintain their reputation that even the better ones risk becoming complacent and even co-opted by the very system they currently criticise. Indeed, some NGOs have already flown so close to the neo-liberal sun that they have melted the wings of their utopian aspirations. Others are constrained by forms of sectarian, partisan or religious exclusion; or simply by wanting to defend their *modus vivendi*. However, many NGOs — North and South — have fully integrated into what, following Korten (1990), we shall call the Fourth Generation, and are maturing and co-operating with each other to create a Fifth. These NGOs are in a prime position to collaborate with social movements or grassroots organisations, and work with them for the structural transformation of society both locally and nationally. 'Think local and global, and act local and global' is the motto of NGOs that are seeking to promote a more equitable society and sustainable environment.

Framework for NGOs

Worldwide, there has been growing participation of civil society in public life, particularly in the last 30 years. We can identify four basic reasons for this phenomenon. Firstly, the disenchantment with and mistrust of officialdom. Secondly, a greater awareness of certain problems that have both a local and a global dimension — principally the increase in poverty and environmental degradation. Thirdly, the rapid globalisation of the world economy in the last two decades, as a consequence of deregulation and privatisation policies. And lastly, largely due to the spread of neo-liberalism, declining living standards among large sectors of the North —

a situation that lends itself to unsupportive or even racist attitudes towards the South, and a denial of the shared causes linking *their* poverty with *ours*.

Further, the ideological orientation of civil participation is as diverse as the many kinds of groups, their objectives, and the ways in which they organise and plan their activities. These range from local mutual assistance initiatives — with the potential to act as the instruments of democratisation, as much in the South as in the North and the East — to the mass mobilisations seen, for instance, in the 1995 public demonstrations against the French government's economic programme; the spontaneous eruptions of social violence in reaction to deteriorating living conditions, such as happened in Los Angeles in 1991; the 1989 'Caracazo' in Venezuela, the 1985 riots in Khartoum, or the 1984 Tunisian 'Bread Revolt'; various emancipatory or organised pressure groups (environmental, pacifist, and feminist, among others); and associations for social change of all kinds, including NGDOs.

Within the NGDO sector, we shall refer especially to those organisations that are tied to social movements, and which:

- influence private and public decision-making that affects them directly, or affects third parties whose interests they defend (by delegation);
- rely on a wide social base;
- claim to hold alternative ideologies or values;
- do advocacy and lobbying on behalf of people or communities whose human rights are infringed by the despotic exercise of economic and political power, both locally and internationally.

For instance, various ecological, pacifist, human-rights, ethnic-minority, feminist, and international solidarity organisations belong to this kind of 'anti-system movement' (Wallerstein, 1984). In some cases, they can be defined as New Social Movements (NSMs), sharing many obvious similarities with the trade-union movement of the nineteenth-century industrial revolution.

However, for organisations that are involved in the social field, the welfare and rights-based campaigning aspects of their work often go on simultaneously, and there are frequently ideological and institutional tensions in trying to harmonise these. This tension is particularly prevalent among NGDOs, an unfortunately imprecise term (perhaps 'International Solidarity Organisations' — ISOs — as used in Francophone areas, would be a better alternative?).

NGDOs: diversity, expansion, North–South co-operation

NGDOs are like a kaleidoscope of national, regional and international institutions of development co-operation (we use the term ‘development’ with all its conceptual ambiguity, assuming that readers will sense what we mean). The OECD calculated in 1988 that there were between two and three times as many NGDOs and similar organisations in the South as in the North (8–12,000 and 4,000 respectively). A major expansion occurred in the 1960s in the North, while in the South it took place in the 1970s, especially in countries like Peru and Mexico, India and Bangladesh, Senegal and Burkina Faso. These Southern NGDOs collaborate in turn with local groups.

By 1994, the number of local NGOs in the South had grown to 50,000. Unlike the earlier OECD calculation, this figure includes small NGDOs, but gives hardly an idea of the actual number of grassroots organisations. For instance, UNDP claims that there are 18,000 NGOs registered in the Philippines, while in the single Indian state of Tamil Nadu there are 25,000, two-thirds of which could be described as grassroots organisations (UNDP, 1993).

An interesting phenomenon is the proliferation of different kinds of networks: national and regional — for example, the NGDO Co-ordinating Committee in Spain, the ‘Conseil des ONG d’Appui au Développement’ (CONGAD) in Senegal, or the Asian NGO Coalition (ANGOC); North–North umbrella groups, such as CIDSE, EURODAD, or EUROSTEP; North–South umbrella groups, like IRED or ICVA; and South–South umbrella groups such as the Latin American Forum for Debt and Development, or Third World Network, which has offices in Malaysia, Uruguay, and Senegal.

As to what constitutes a desirable relationship between Northern and Southern NGDOs in terms of co-operation — an issue not covered here — we believe that the principal objective continues to be that Northern agencies should seek to withdraw from the scene, leaving the field entirely to the indigenous agencies (Gill, 1988: 172). The most important role for northern NGDOs is in their own countries. This withdrawal from the scene implies a process of decentralisation both in financial matters and in decision-making on the part of the Northern NGDO, but without losing direct contact with the situation on the ground, or with the analysis and campaigning activities of Southern people, their organisations and grassroots movements.

A point worth emphasising is that many NGOs worldwide are companions in a continual learning and evolutionary process, whose two chief goals are, on the one hand, to give power and voice to those who are socially, economically, and culturally oppressed; and, on the other, to create a new model of relationships between the peoples of the North and the South.

Northern NGOs

Schematically, we can define organisations of international co-operation which act in and from the North as non-profit organisations that are economically independent of official funding, have strong popular support, and emerge from private efforts to improve the living conditions of the poorest groups in the South and increase their social and political participation; while, at the same time, raising the awareness of their fellow citizens about the causes and nature of their (and increasingly our) impoverishment, and challenging those public and private authorities whose decisions are standing in the way of establishing a global society in which human rights are respected.

Of course, even if most NGOs are politically non-partisan, none, irrespective of their ideological persuasion, can avoid the fact that development co-operation is itself unequivocally political and that it demands 'putting oneself on the side of' some, or even 'against' third parties, as Chambers puts it.

However, it is worrying to see the emergence of two strictly limited types of NGO in recent years:

- those tied to fundamentalist groups or sects based on fundraising, proselytising, or gaining political influence. These have been active in Latin America since the mid-1970s through the infiltration of evangelical churches and ultra-conservative US-funded NGOs that served to demobilise the popular sectors;
- those which appear to be non-profit solidarity organisations, but in reality are profit-seeking.

As regards their funding, Northern NGOs have seen their private funds quadruple in real terms between 1975 and 1993, rising from US\$1.3 to US\$5.7 billion (DAC/OECD, 1996). This now represents 9.2 per cent of total aid, that is official development aid plus private donations to NGOs. According to the latest available data (1987), these donations are concentrated in the USA and Germany, which together represent 66 per

cent of the total. However, if we take the estimates of the Development Aid Committee (DAC) of the OECD, while there are notable differences between countries, the total amount raised by NGOs from their fellow citizens has practically stagnated in the last four years.

The same is not true of the amounts received from public sources, since despite representing only 14 per cent of the total funds channelled through NGOs in 1993, these amounts increased 30-fold between 1983/84 and 1993, reaching US\$956 million. Lastly, while no firm figures are available, direct bilateral funding to Southern NGOs is increasingly significant.

Northern NGOs: generations and areas of work

Generations of NGOs

Largely inspired by Korten's classification, we can speak of four generations of Northern NGOs (also applicable to an extent to those in the South) according to their overall orientation (Korten, 1990) (see Table 1).

- **First generation:** *welfarist* and characterised by emergency activities that began around 1945, the year in which the Nuclear Era began (with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), the Second World War ended, and the United Nations was created; one year before the signing of the Bretton Woods Agreements from which the World Bank for Reconstruction and Development was born, and whose most important institutions are the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).
- **Second generation** — *developmental*, in that they promote local development in the South and raise public awareness in the North, taking 1960 — the year in which 17 African countries gained their independence — as their starting point: the beginning of the neo-colonial dependency era.
- **Third generation:** based on *partnership* with the South and protest in the North, and for which 1973 can be taken as their starting point, the year in which the non-aligned countries proclaimed a New International Economic Order (NIEO) and which, paradoxically, thanks to higher petrol prices, which gave rise to the abundance of petro-dollars, began the period of Southern indebtedness that resulted in the so-called debt crisis of 1982 when Mexico claimed that it could no longer service its foreign debt.

Table 1: Generations of Northern Non-Governmental Organisations (NGDOs)

| Orientation in North (N) and South (S) | First Wellfarist (S) | Second Local development (S) Awareness-raising (N) | Third Partnership (S) and Critique (N) | Fourth Empowerment (S) and Political pressure (N) |
|--|--|---|---|---|
| Year of reference | 1945 | 1960 | 1973 | 1982 |
| Dominant mind-set | Emergency assistance, eg Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Save the Children (UK), BRAC (Bangladesh) | Development (North as development model; belief in 'trickle-down' effect) | Development as self-reliant political process (New International Economic Order seen to be possible) | Development must be socially equitable, and ecologically sustainable at local and global level. Gender analysis and empowerment of excluded groups. |
| Definition of the problem | Lack of goods and services | Lack of economic and technological resources. Basic needs not met. Under-development and neo-colonialism. | Institutional limitations, as well as local, national, and international policies. Role of local elites and transnational economic groups. | Local, national, and international limitations. Non-development in South, mal-development in North. Poverty as denial of basic human rights. |
| Timeframe for action | Immediate | As long as the project continues | Indefinite, long-term | Indefinite future |
| Scope | Individual or household | Community or people | Regional or national | National or global |
| Main actor | NGO donor | NGDOs in North and South, base/grassroots groups and beneficiary communities | All public and private institutions comprising the relevant system | Formal and informal networks of people and organisations at local and international level |
| Relations with NGDOs in North and South | — | Transfer of economic and other resources | Northern NGDOs: from funding to partnership | Concerted action and mutual support; decentralisation |
| Development education | Starving babies | Community self-help initiatives | Politics and institutions that impede local self-reliant development | Planetary community. Social, economic, political, and ecological inter-dependence. |
| Political strategy | — | Awareness-raising among general public about living conditions in the South. Emerging conflict between this and fundraising capacity. | Protest phase, directed at the interests and organisations that prevent the alleviation of poverty in the South. Denunciation of hunger and unequal terms of trade; lobbying for 0.7% of GNP for development aid. | Protest plus proposal phase. Denunciation and action: political pressure, public mobilisation, strategic alliances, growing use of social and telecommunications; encouragement for research. |

Source: based on Korten (1990:117). The original version has been significantly modified and expanded.

- **Fourth generation** — based on *empowerment* in the South and *lobbying* in the North, and emerging from 1982. Obviously, this overlaps with the previous generations and shares many of their characteristics. It is formed by those NGOs who, without abandoning their close co-operation with their Southern counterparts, prioritise the lobbying of opinion-makers and powerful groups as well as research and public awareness-raising in their own countries.

While ‘generation’ is a useful concept, it does have its limitations: the overlapping of different generations, the co-existence in many NGOs of characteristics that fit into more than one generation, the marked differences in how these have evolved in different countries, and so on. But the term nevertheless implies evolution and adaptation to the socio-economic context, and assumes that certain central decisions will be taken in order to meet a given organisation’s central objectives.

The change processes of established NGOs and the emergence of new players likewise assume increasing diversity within the sector, and the growing specialisation of its members as well as ideological diversity among them. While the first generation is no worse than the fourth — it is vital to work for people’s survival in situations of real need — we believe that certain characteristics and objectives of the latter make them better able to:

- contribute to bringing about structural economic and political changes in favour of those who are marginalised and impoverished throughout the world, in the belief that, as Jon Sobrino SJ argues, they frequently offer ‘community against individualism, service against selfishness, simplicity against opulence’, and can learn from their own efforts and others’ ‘struggles for freedom’ (Sobrino, 1992:32); and
- contribute to bringing about structural economic and political changes in favour of the environment to which we are inextricably linked, in that ‘everything that happens to the earth will happen to the earth’s children’ (letter to Ulysses Grant from Chief Seattle of the Dwasmish and Suquamish Tribes in 1855).

Areas of activity

Northern NGOs include very diverse organisations involved in one or more of the following activities: technical advice (appropriate technology, livestock techniques, management and administration models); the sending of volunteer co-operants; the funding of development

programmes; development education, (including publications and activities aimed at the general public, teachers, and a range of educational levels); fair-trade issues; and research and lobbying.

While there are some 4,000 NGOs in the 20 member countries of the DAC (which handle more than 95 per cent of official development assistance), a small number account for most of the sector's activities, including public and private fund-raising. Certainly, if an NGO wants to work without external impositions or conditions, it needs the kind of economic independence that comes from private funding. But the OECD has found that 90 per cent of the available resources are concentrated in only 20 per cent of the NGOs registered. This is not to deny the important role played by smaller organisations, in terms of their critical input and their capacity to complement the vision of the larger NGOs.

In terms of development education, a 1990 OECD survey of 2,542 major Northern NGOs showed that, while 75 per cent ran development education programmes, only a small proportion of these involved activities that went beyond, for example, publishing materials or organising conferences. Development education continues to be a pending item on the agenda of many NGOs which have the means to promote it, but choose to focus instead on their overseas assistance programmes, even at the expense of making an impact in their own societies.

Julius Nyrere, the former president of Tanzania, replied to a question put to him 30 years ago by Leslie Kirkley, the Director of Oxfam, on how best this organisation might help Tanzania. His advice is still valid: 'Take each and every penny that you have planned for Tanzania and spend it in the United Kingdom explaining to your co-citizens the nature and causes of poverty' (Harris, in Harris and Poulton (eds) 1988:7). Similarly, Southern NGOs and more progressive networks constantly request that their Northern counterparts re-direct their activities in order to give more importance to defending the interests of Southern people, and especially to influencing the business, financial, and development-aid policies of their governments, their transnational companies, and the multilateral institutions that are having such an adverse effect on people's well-being and their chances of social and political progress.

Southern NGOs have therefore called on their Northern counterparts to intervene decisively in awareness-raising, protest, and lobbying activities. Two key declarations in this regard are the June 1989 Manila Declaration on People's Participation and Sustainable Development, prepared by 31 Southern NGO directors; and the so-called 1990 Arusha

Declaration — the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation — proposed by a large group of NGOs and African grassroots organisations (though representatives of Northern NGOs, governments, and multilateral organisations also attended).

Clearly, the leading NGOs do have enormous value. Their three main activities are mutually reinforcing: the transfer of resources (funds, goods, and services), public awareness-raising, and political campaigning. The last two may be specific — such as lobbying around the final phase of the UN inter-governmental conferences, GATT negotiations, or Lomé Agreements); or more general and sustained — for instance, working on foreign debt, official development aid, gender policies, or follow-up on inter-governmental agreements. The synergistic nature of activities carried out ‘here’ in the North and ‘there’ in the South is possible because:

- collaboration with Southern NGO allies provides their Northern counterparts with first-hand information and analysis of the political, economic, cultural, and social situation in those countries;
- awareness-raising activities both draw on and adapt this flow of information (opinions, concerns, struggles, readings of the international situation) and make it accessible to their various target groups; and
- lobbying activities based on seeing the repercussions of decisions taken in the North on the people who live in the South demand an attitude of solidarity, and condemnation of the stubborn defence of the privileges enjoyed by Northern interest groups. And while Northern NGOs are putting pressure on their governments to spend their aid budgets effectively (through, for instance, the work done since 1972 to reach the UN target of aid allocations equivalent to 0.7 per cent of GNP), Southern NGOs should be enabled to demand from their own governments that this aid be used to benefit those most in need.

Lobbying also presents NGOs with a great opportunity to keep faith with their central objectives. The major UN conferences and inter-governmental ‘Summits’, especially since UNCED in 1992, have been forums in which, despite the lukewarm commitments of their governments, many NGOs have learned how to develop lobbying strategies by establishing contacts and forming networks to promote mutual concerns. Between 4,000 and 20,000 NGO delegates have participated in the alternative forums held alongside each of these conferences, while some 2,000 to 4,000 have attended the official events.

In the 1970s and 1980s (and even before), the emergence of Northern NGOs that specialised in lobbying campaigns (such as World Development Movement in the UK, Bread for the World in the USA, Agir Ici in France, or the Berne Declaration in Switzerland) represented a milestone. Notable achievements included the 1979 campaign started by 150 NGOs worldwide as part of the International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), which gained UN approval for a Code of Conduct prohibiting the immoral promotion of breastmilk-substitutes by transnational companies such as Nestlé.

At present, in the North as in the South, there is enough accumulated campaigning experience to make it possible to speak about an embryonic lobbying movement that, through concrete and well-planned actions, and thanks to the ideological synergy, complementarity, and like-mindedness of the major NGOs, is itself generating an alternative globalisation process. With or without the backing of Northern NGOs, there is for instance a remarkable Southern movement opposing the construction of 30 large dams (besides 135 of medium size and 3,000 small ones) in the sacred Narmada river valley in India, just as the felling of the Sarawak forest is opposed by the movement of the Penan indians who live there.

But despite all this, there is no call for complacency. There is a long path to tread before we reach the hypothetical alternative globalisation to which we referred above. As we have been warned: 'If [the ineffectual public bodies] make ordinary citizens giddy by sending them from one counter to another, [they also] make the NGOs waste time by calling them to endless meetings', without making any real progress (Vázquez, 1996). Undoubtedly, the same warning is relevant to other organisations with which the NGOs must engage within their respective spheres of influence.

Northern NGOs on the threshold of the twenty-first century

The world (dis)order in which we are immersed is characterised by dependency relationships between the periphery (or peripheries) and the centre (or centres) at both a global and local level, peripheries that have been extended by the populations of Eastern Europe. This situation has allowed increasing wealth, resources, and political power to accumulate in the hands of the few, while the system is kept relatively stable, thanks to patronage, the use of commercial or financial pressure or, quite simply, repression or military force (as in the case of the 1991 Gulf War). Even if

we all do so to an extent, those who benefit most from the system ensure that they have the necessary means to maintain this unequal division of power at the local, regional, national, and international levels.

In the context of the processes of economic globalisation, two worrying elements stand out: firstly, the absence of opposing models for social progress and participatory, equitable, and environmentally sustainable economic development (though these have been outlined on a small scale and there is a major body of accumulated historical wisdom now concealed by obsolete modernisation models); and secondly, the lack of genuinely representative international institutions in a world in which the nation state appears to play an increasingly insignificant role, especially in order to defend the most vulnerable sectors. This neglect by the public authorities is only countered and moderated by strengthening the New Social Movements mentioned earlier, and by the growing organisation and participation of poor communities in creating a more equitable economic and social order at the local level.

Within such a context, and given all their accumulated experience, what role can those NGOs play that have reached, or largely taken on board, the Fourth Generation? What might a Fifth Generation look like?

Twelve steps towards the future

As they evolve, Northern NGOs must become more sensitive and critical of their role in mediating between poor communities in the South and their own fellow citizens and governments. And they must also abandon their old function as mere financial intermediaries by trying to incorporate the maximum *added value* that would justify playing this role. At present some NGOs, albeit a minority, are simply a *modus vivendi* for their staff, in an ever more precarious job market. The challenge is for Northern NGOs to transform themselves into reliable ‘transmission belts’ for the perceptions, concerns, and struggles of the South, while also assuming their role as funders of ‘added value’ via development education, awareness-raising, and lobbying — all with the objective of democratising and transforming the structures of their own societies and, as equal partners with Southern NGOs, global society itself.

Among the foreseeable changes and risks that are entailed in steering a course between pragmatism (the best possible option) and utopia (the most desirable option), Northern NGOs should bear in mind the twelve following courses of action — directions that also apply to some extent to Southern NGOs, as to those of Eastern Europe as these become stronger:

1 The decrease in private funding in absolute terms, and certainly relative to public funding (especially assistance which is destined for humanitarian and emergency aid), will make it imperative that NGOs should be doubly aware of the risk of being co-opted or manipulated by the public authorities.

2 Those NGOs that depend largely on public finance run the risk of becoming mere government subsidiaries or substitutes, by implementing activities formerly carried out by their own governments or multilateral institutions.

3 Fundraising campaigns will have to be scrupulous in their image codes, resisting the temptation to be sensationalist, even more so when some NGOs still have no qualms about using what has been described as ‘the artery that connects the heart with the wallet’ (Clark, 1991). Equally, we must not forget that ‘NGOs, in contrast to profitable companies, do not work to gain a bigger slice of the “market”, but to help others to grow. At the end of the day, our commitment as an NGO is to withdraw ourselves from the *business*’ (Dichter, 1989).

4 There will be a restructuring of the non-governmental co-operation sector, with a drop in the number of generalist NGOs, an increase in the number of those specialising in emergency activities, and an increase in mergers between small and medium-sized NGOs.

5 There will be a major increase in the number of civil-action and lobbying campaigns, as well as in the number of organisations and networks involved in them. Likewise, spontaneous movements for change and social protest must be monitored, and on occasion supported — movements that will probably be on the increase in the years to come.

6 NGOs will become more involved in poverty-eradication activities in their own societies — a step already taken by the Comité contre la Faim et pour le Développement (CCFD) in France, and Oxfam in Britain, among others, and by some Austrian, German, and Swiss NGOs elsewhere in Europe.

7 NGOs should not fear growth (Schumacher would have agreed that, even if ‘small is beautiful’, large is not necessarily ugly), but must maintain the balance between such growth and their capacity to adapt to a highly changeable economic and social environment.

8 NGOs should dedicate a far greater proportion of their resources to activities which mobilise and raise the awareness of their fellow citizens. NGOs involved in fair-trade activities must put more effort into making this an effective tool for development education, while offering greater economic support to producer groups and co-operatives in the South.

9 NGOs should push, both individually and with other organisations and academic institutions, for research and analysis into all the issues related to their practical work in the context of North–South–East relations. This research is essential, if their campaigns are to achieve maximum impact.

10 NGOs should face the challenge presented by modern telecommunications and the need to be more efficient in sharing information and ideas through meetings and other forms of exchange.

11 NGOs should increasingly apply the principle of subsidiarity (decentralisation), so that activities that can be carried out by Southern NGOs and grassroots organisations should not undertaken by their Northern counterparts.

12 Northern NGOs should share their private-sector fund-raising experience with those from the South, so that the latter may reduce their dependence on external finance, including bilateral and multilateral aid (direct financing).

Finally, we should ask if it is possible, or indeed desirable, for NGO networks to become political parties; or for political parties to evolve from them, as has happened with environmental NGOs in Germany. Unlike the Greens, the parties we envisage would set themselves up in different countries, both Northern and Southern, eventually allowing for the emergence of transnational organisations which supersede present models (such as those of the International Socialist or Christian Democracy). Given that there will always be a need for some NGOs that are distanced from and critical of institutional power, and assuming that parliamentary representation will survive as a political model, will some governments even regard such a conversion of the NGO sector as necessary, given their own declining decision-making power, and the fact that they are increasingly beholden to the interests of minorities who cling to national and transnational economic power?

Northern NGOs must listen carefully to criticism and be prepared to be self-critical, since this will help them to become more effective and publicly transparent. Galand (1994) questions whether Northern NGOs have become victims of their own success — or at least of their good public image. If so, he believes, the price would be the loss of their original protest image for one of ‘consensual’ organisations that are more docile in their opposition to power and more likely to conform to the lowest common denominator. Others go further, claiming that Southern NGOs (we assume they refer especially to Quangos, quasi-NGOs, or para-statal NGOs) that are funded by multilateral agencies and Northern

NGDOs 'have ended up playing a subordinate, if ever more important, role in putting structural adjustment into practice' (Petras and Vieux, 1995). They add that 'NGOs have had a negative impact on autonomous social movements'.

Tandon (1991) further questions the role of some African NGDOs, criticising what he considers to be their lack of transparency in decision-making and the handling of funds. He also accuses them of frequently imposing Western cultural models, of shackling the evaluation of their work by other African NGDOs, of paternalism, and of establishing dependency relationships that hark back to the colonial era. His views are shared by others who perceive Northern NGOs to be imposing an alien 'agenda' on those of the South, one that changes according to *fashions* in development — whether gender, human rights, environment, or whatever.

We believe that NGDOs are at a crossroads in their history, which calls for a serious re-think of their social function. To avoid lurching between cautious reform and violent revolution, they must strengthen those activities and objectives that will enable them to contribute to a radical reform of the system. Doing so will certainly provoke tensions and confrontations at both an inter-personal and institutional level. However, NGDOs that are committed to defending the interests of those worst affected by the present economic and political system (and to working alongside them in this) *must* denounce mechanisms and processes of oppression and social exclusion. They may also have to oppose those NGDOs that are motivated by interests which ultimately impede the eradication of poverty and the full participation of men and women in the processes of emancipation, and their efforts to create a society which arises from their own perceptions and priorities.

'Action involves conflict of interest', claims Robert Chambers, adding that 'the periods of confrontation and big reversal' are not the most frequent, but rather those 'for patient work on small things'. We should, then, blend the patience needed when we compare utopia and reality, with the impatience of radicalism, the indignation of seeing the avoidable suffering of so many men and women, and the abuse of power and arrogance of the minority.

One central idea stands out from these reflections: co-operation between Northern and Southern NGDOs should be much more than the mere transfer of appropriate knowledge, technology, and financial resources. For the ultimate goal of development is not economic growth, but the well-being of the most vulnerable, with their full participation in local and global issues that affect their lives — *empowerment*.

Secondly, development co-operation entails, among other things, the exchange — and in the long term the blending — of cultures between North and South. This still largely remains as an agenda item, but could be seen as an authentic contribution to sustainable development that Southern societies give to the North (CRIES, 1990). Such a model also implies an integrated vision of human relations, one which would facilitate the structural change and democratisation of global society on the basis of inter-cultural dialogue and solidarity-based co-operation.

We conclude with the words of Jon Sobrino SJ, a colleague and friend of the late Ignacio Ellacuría SJ (one of the six Jesuit priests assassinated by the Salvadoran Armed Forces in 1989), and a teacher at the University of Central America (UCA) in San Salvador:

From an anthropological point of view, if solidarity were merely aid, it would be no more than a praiseworthy act of charity, in which the donor gives something of what he has, but without seeing himself as being deeply committed, or under any compulsion to maintain the aid. Seen in this way, aid would only be in one direction, from the person who gives to the one who receives. In this way, two essential elements of solidarity would be overlooked: *personal commitment*, not only material aid; *the decision to offer help in the long term*, not merely to offer immediate relief, *and the willingness to receive*, not only to give (Sobrino, 1995:293, our emphasis).

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