

DISCUSSION PAPER

Topic: Ten years of Democracy in South Africa-Mobilising Resources for Greater impact on children and families

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Statement of the Problem: The absence of a dynamic link between poor communities and resources available for development is making it very difficult for communities to participate in alleviating their own poverty. Available resources through government, NGOs, donors, and corporations are scattered with very weak links between themselves and even weaker links to communities and internal community resources.

It has been argued over and over that external resources have little impact on community development if not matched by internal resources and if the 'benefiting' community is not an integral part of any poverty alleviation process.

This paper argues that development practitioners and policy makers can respond to children in a more dynamic manner if communities drive the development agenda and if resources are viewed broadly and linked, in particular the paper looks at the NGO sector as the sector that often represents the interest of the poor. The paper therefore is an attempt to explore potential synergies and creative tensions within, among and between all development players. This is a beginning of a discussion and has not in any way concluded issues that have been raised.

1. Introduction

For the purpose of the study we shall use the term civil society organisation (CSO) to refer to both developmental nongovernmental organisations and community-based organisations and we shall assume that the terms represent the same value". We shall then refer the rich network of indigenous organisations operating at local and family level as grassroots organisations.

2. **Background**

Historically South Africa boasted of a huge, vibrant and dynamic civil society. These organisations represented the aspirations of the people for an independent democratic society. These were highly organised groups. Citizens with the help of professional NGOs organised themselves street by street and from village to village.

The establishment of a new political dispensation resulted in high levels of community demobilisation and lack of vision among civil society activists. While South Africa celebrated its democracy it also acknowledged that there was a price to pay. One of the areas whereby a high price was paid is the area of civil society. Apartheid in its viciousness had inevitably created unity of purpose in communities. Govender¹ states, “The strategic focus of the NGOs became confused and diffused. Prior to 1994 the focus of the NGOs was to organise and support resistance to the apartheid state. Many NGOs became rudderless when a democratic dispensation came into being. Instead of focusing on what the democratic government was unable or unwilling to do they attempted to continue with their old tasks, often duplicating the functions of, especially, the local state”. The tension between an active progressive state and civil society increased as the state took on its traditional role and civil society had to redefine its role. This might sound strange to those unfamiliar with the context but one has to understand the fact that most of these organisations have their genesis in the critical period of the liberation struggle and provided services to their constituencies that a discredited and illegitimate state could not do. These services ranged from organisational support to health care, education, civic and legal support or trade union formations, undertaking research to assist their client organisations to better understand the obstacles they were confronting and the options available in negotiating with an intractable state.

¹ Charm Govender Trends in Civil society www.idasa.org

A further important feature of these non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is that they attracted to them intellectual resources of a very high calibre, as these individuals were reticent to be associated with an illegitimate state. Besides the NGO sector community based organisations led by revolutionaries such as the Steven Bantu Biko (later assassinated by the apartheid government) dominated the civic space and ensured high levels of mobilisation for issues ranging from health care to political liberation.

The advent of a democratic and legitimate state, freed those who were unwilling to be associated with the apartheid state to now work in the new state. Govender states that at the time it was the patriotic duty of politically conscious individuals with the apposite skills to enter the new state and assist in its transformation. Inevitably many "comrades" chose this route. NGO, CBO and trade union capacity became depleted and this in some way contributes to the belief that the current crop of progressive organs of civil society is weaker.

The present government has clearly called for civil society participation in policy formulation and implementation. The sector, however, is often too weak in terms of leadership, vision and strategy to take advantage of the political environment and challenge politicians. In many instances NGOs are too eagerly looking to the state for survival through tendering for state services.

Idasa sums up this situation quite succinctly ² by asserting that the challenges Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in South Africa have faced in redefining their roles since 1994 are mirrored to a large extent by the ways in which CSOs define or fail to define their roles at local government level.

²By Nico Bezuidenhout and Benjy Mautjane Idasa

2.1 Policy Environment

The new South Africa has brought about new policies and programmes with respect to children and youth. Democracy has brought about an improvement in the recognition of children's rights, through policies that are progressive and reassuring. The policies provide the legal parameters and basis for addressing children and youth issues. These policies are progressive and provide reassurance that the country is moving in the right direction. There is improved, access (to the many of the new benefits) for millions within the majority population. There is new space and an enabling environment for organizing. There is transition in the sector, which has enabled large alliances to be formed.. The Department of Social Development has shown a strong desire to move from a welfare approach to development.

The National Constitution of South Africa provides for Childrens' Rights, protection of the family, and to care. Through the Constitution, Bill of Rights and various policies all children under 18 years of age are entitled to: Family care; Name and Nationality; Safe home and community environment; Education; Language and culture; Protection from maltreatment; neglect; abuse or degradation.

Some of the critical policy instruments include:

- African Charter on the Rights of Children
- The establishment of the Office on the Status of Rights of Children in the Presidency
- The introduction of the Child Care Grant (social security)
- The current Children Bill and Child Justice Bill for Juveniles by the Department of Justice –
- An integrated programme through the department of Social Development, as embodied by the current Bill.

The latter two acknowledge that the family is taken as a totality of child development and support - acknowledging overarching social circumstances and conditions.

The government has further established several legislative instruments to encourage NGO participation this includes the creation of mechanisms to fund such participation. For example in 1998 the government established the National Development Agency (NDA).³ The primary object of the NDA was to strengthen grassroots participation in development processes and enable community to determine their own futures. The state allocated significant resources to support this initiative. It is important to note that according to the act the NDA was to be governed by a board dominated by civil society and that the Chair of the Board should at all times be appointed from Civil Society representatives.

At local level new legislation such as the Constitution, the Municipal Systems Act and the Municipal Structures Act create space for public participation in local governance through specific mechanisms such as Ward Committees and Integrated Development Planning (although these do not preclude other forms of public participation, such as “imbizos”, special traditional community dialogues and sector forums created by CSOs) and demand that local government promotes public participation. In addition to this, CSOs are called upon to make input into policy developments such as Provincial Growth and Development strategies.

The President of South Africa Mr Thabo Mbeki in his opening address at the summit for sustainable development in Johannesburg he states “We depend on you, members of civil society, to continue to be the torch-bearers for sustainable

³ National Development Agency

development, combatants for a better life for the peoples of the world, fighters for the preservation of our planet.”⁴

4. Challenges Facing Children and their families

In discussing levels of poverty amongst children, the impact HIV-AIDS on them and their families we do run the risk of focusing on numbers as represented in cold statistics and fail to capture the human tragedy that is unfolding. I therefore use the statistics with caution and for purposes of focusing our efforts and point us as civil society to areas of meaningful intervention. Poverty, unemployment and inequality appear to be increasing in South Africa. At least 45 percent of the population live in absolute poverty. This figure varies between 45 percent and 55 percent, depending on the poverty line and measure used. According to another study by the University of South Africa ⁵between 57 percent and 75 percent of children in South Africa are living in poverty (depending on the poverty measure used). Research showed that when using the relative poverty measure, 59 percent of children in South Africa aged 17 years or younger live in poverty - "an estimated 10.5 million children". The same study further elaborates as follows:

"When using an absolute poverty measure of R490 [about US \$62 at the current exchange rate] household income per month as the minimum income required for basic needs, survival, and a healthy life, 75 percent of 0- to 17-year olds live in poverty - an estimated 14.3 million,"

There is a general agreement among various stakeholders, Government, Civil Society groups that HIV-AIDS is considered the one factor further compromising the well being of children.

⁴ President Thabo Mbeki

⁵ child poverty www.innews.org/report.asp

HIV/AIDS has had an unprecedented effect on communities and families in the world since the first report⁶ on what has now developed into a catastrophe beyond proportions. The epidemic is the leading cause of death among populations in the age range of 15-49 years worldwide. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has been particularly virulent in Africa South of the Sahara with the epicentre lying in Southern Africa⁷ where an estimated 12.3 million children and young people have lost one or both parents to the pandemic while millions more have been made vulnerable because their parents or primary care givers are infected by HIV/AIDS⁸. Primarily we are all dealing with the phenomenon of an absent generation. In many communities grandmothers have had to play a parenting role.

3.2 *Community Groups or grassroots organisation and their role in Communities*

A rich network of indigenous community organisations that continue to support life at village or township level is one of South Africa's strengths. These organisations keep children in school, enabling families to stay out of the worst of poverty situations. In their own way they provide psychosocial support. Over many years we have come to realise that very dynamic and visionary leadership keeps these community networks together. In papers commissioned by Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation⁹ leadership is defined in one of the papers as the act of ordinary people mobilising other people to create positive change in the society. In the document a researcher observes 'We are struck by the deep experience and rich traditions of people throughout the 'South' in leadership development.

It is important that in our discourse we acknowledge and pay proper respect to these groups. Often these are referred to as

⁶ Morbidity and mortality weekly report, June 5, 1981. Centre for disease Control's National Centre for HIV, STD and TB Prevention.

⁷ Southern Africa is taken as comprising: Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zambia and Zimbabwe

⁸ Children on the Brink (July 2004); UNAIDS.

⁹ Grassroot leadership Development in the South commissioned by Mary Reynolds Babcock foundation www.mrbf.org/resources

informal because they might not fit into the accepted parameters of formality. Formality often implies 'driven' by professionals, academics or other similar groups. Particularly in the advocacy community, I've noticed that "grass roots" organizations are often contrasted with organizations founded by outsiders, usually meaning upper class people, or professionals¹⁰. These groups speak a different language but they are the absolute backbone of communities. COADY International Institute in its attempt to understand community initiated and driven initiatives collected 52 such stories in their region. In their conclusion what stood out in all the 52 stories was the role of particular individuals who catalyse the process. These catalyst may be traditional leaders or leaders that emerge because of a particular situation or advantage. They continue to observe that, such leaders were able to stimulate a sense of pride and opportunity. This leadership recognised the potential within the community, as well as the potential outside:" sons and daughters" living elsewhere, sometimes in larger centres, and opportunities available through linkages with external institutions¹¹. The Babcock document describes or explains these as actions of ordinary people with a moral centre, commitment, visionary yet pragmatic leaders, to shape and improve their communities.

Blade Nzimande argues that over very many decades, in the face of tremendous odds, there has been the organic, community based development of black entrepreneurship - in commerce, including in taverns; shop-owners; small-scale farming; in soccer clubs; in entertainment and cultural work; in transport; in health-care; in savings associations. Much of it has been based on family networks and on co-operative forms of organisation (stokvels, burial societies).

¹⁰ Jo Anne Schneider www.chss.iup.edu/jscneid Sept 08 2003

¹¹ God Cunningham and Alison Mathie, Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation, University of Manchester, Feb 27-28 2003

Mobilising resources in the hands of the workers, the poor and small business¹²

Examples of such groups in South Africa:

(i) Stokvels: This is an old South African practice dating back to English rule and 'Stock fair's. poor African women adopted and adapted the practice forming their own local based support groups. Because of black people love for social interaction these soon multiplied and served all kinds of purposes.¹³ In most instance NGOs do not understand the value of these groups. Often they refer to them as 'savings' groups or micro finance or anything else understood by the world of 'development'. These groups have such influence and are so central to the lives of people that male groups as well as youth Stokvels have increased in the last few years¹⁴. Increasingly there is an increasing debate about Stokvels. Many Banks have designed special programme to attract these groups. Over time these groups have cut across economic status but they remain the critical support to people especially in the times when families face challenges of HIV-AIDS. More importantly, these groups have over time delivered results enabling poor families to break the circle of poverty.

(ii) Home Based Care Group

The first response to the AIDS crisis is often from community based groups in the form of Home based Care and support to patients who are at home. Such community initiatives are the best suited to assist orphaned children as the children already know them. Bringing in people not known to the children adds to their trauma. People from the neighbourhood and also those who have known the family through the church, stokvel or any structure that the deceased parents were part of are

¹² HSRC:SACP Forward to a people's cooperative Bank

¹³ Lukhele A Stokvels in SA 1990

¹⁴ Lukhele Stokvels

sensitised/mobilised and trained to better respond to the calls of the children of sick and dying parents. Neighbours are there for the child so that the child can call for assistance and have an adult assisting and sparing the child the trauma of being alone at the deathbed of the parent.

Retired nurses establish HBC groups in poor areas together with other women and this is in response to the desperate need of the care for the sick:

Home-based care programmes are in most cases the ones that identify orphans and vulnerable children during the sickness or death of a parent. The HBC workers are the first on the scene and the first to be contacted by the children when the parents are dead and the dying parent's last words and wishes about their children are left with the HBC workers. They establish a close relationship and association with the families of the sick and in the process are trusted even above some of the family members. The children get attached to them and they also get to know the family needs and history which they then have to pass on to the children¹⁵.

(iii) The role of the Church

South African victorious emergence from long term hardship and turmoil after apartheid can be attributed to many factors, including the influence of social groups key among these is the church. The church is about the one entity structured to cater for people at family level and influence the country at the most highest level of governance and policy making. The Kampala declaration of all African Council of Churches asserts "The Church is uniquely placed to combat HIV-AIDS at all levels from individual to the global and to protect the marginalized and most vulnerable in society. We are compelled by life,

¹⁵ Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, Ngcobo F (unpublished)

death, and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to love, think and act”¹⁶ The church brings the necessary value base for development. In the latest studies conducted over 80% of South African belong to a church¹⁷. In the last few year the church all over the world has struggles with the best way to support people. There has been many successes and failures but it is encouraging to read the following from Rev Dr Sam Kobia "We have felt the anguish of Africa. Nearly 10,000 people are newly infected each day. We have been inspired by the courage and dignity of people living with HIV/AIDS. We have confessed our silence as the church and (to) our actions that have contributed to the spread of the disease and (to) death"¹⁸.

Of importance in this discussion is that as the leadership struggled to find its way on supporting people circumstance forced both the leadership and members to respond. Womens’ groups, referred to as, ‘Manyano’ response has been the most self less and instructive to all of us. Many women have taken in orphaned children, often at the expense of their families.

The key role in charity work that is played by organised and institutionalised female groups within the Catholic Church that include religious solidarities is broadly acknowledged by society.

Despite a legal mandate in South Africa for civil society participation in the local governance process, civil society engagement with local government is ineffective, inconsistent or lacking all together. Since the establishment of democracy in South Africa in

¹⁶ www.churchwideservice.org.Edu_Advo/HIVChurchSpeaks.htm

¹⁷ <http://students.washcall.edu.isr/vol/articles2.Youkiko.pdf>

¹⁸ www.churchwideservice.org.Edu-- Rev. Dr. Sam Kobia, World Council of Churches (WCC)

1994, the civil society sector, including NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs), has found it difficult to make the transition from anti-apartheid activism to one of engagement and partnership with government in promoting development¹⁹.

Scale and Scope of civil society:

A discussion on broad development resources that are available to development is important in this paper where we are trying to find additional support, financial, technical and other to grassroots organisations.

A recent study undertaken jointly by the Institute for Policy Studies and the Centre for Civil Society in conjunction with the John Hopkins University emphasises the significance of civil society as a distinct economic sector in South Africa²⁰. The study estimated that there were 98 920 Non-Profits in South Africa of which 53% were less formalised, grassroots organisations. The study further estimates that during 1998, the private voluntary sector mobilised resources worth an estimated R13.2billion(\$2 Billion).

Of the almost R13Billion (\$2billion) estimated income of the non-profit sector it was found it was found that the government contributed 42%, and that the private sector in South Africa and the International non-governmental make up about 25% of this contribution. The study points out that there is a further significant unqualified contribution, being the value placed upon volunteer work.

¹⁹PACT,strengthening Civil society

²⁰ Mark Swilling and Bev Russell: The size and scope of the Non-profit sector in South Africa. University of Witwatersrand 2002

5. An Emerging Community Based Partnership Response for children.

The issue of finding solutions that are more participatory is key in the latest theory and programme conceptualisation and implementation. The World Bank leads with Community driven Development, The Ford Foundation has invested in Social Capital-Asset Building approaches, UNDP has advocated for Community Based Pro-poor initiatives, the list is long and we have no intentions to be exhaustive. Below we discuss some of the partnership that are based on community empowerment for children:

4.1 Partnerships for Children

Goelama (A tswana word meaning to nurture, care and protect the most vulnerable)

The Nelson Mandela Children's Fund developed the Goelama Project to respond to the social and economic needs of the growing number of children who are affected by the illness and death of their parents. The programme is designed as a pilot for other donors and government to scale. Documentation has therefore been a key component of the programme.

In the Goelama project the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund wanted to respond to a critical policy and practice question: How do we (government, Civil Society, Grass root organisations) mitigate the impact of HIV-AIDS on children and their families?

In year 2000 10 sites in three provinces namely, KwaZulu Natal, Mpumalanga, Northern Province were selected for this purpose. The organisation planned to:

- *Develop community support systems for children and their extended families*
- *Improve family food security and incomes*
- *Involve local government and other government departments in community support for children*
- *Stimulate AIDS prevention activities among youth*

Goelama works in partnership with a local organizations in each site to develop community coalitions. The coalitions work to bring together existing community groups such as women's groups, church groups, poverty project groups, advice offices, home based care groups and old people's clubs. These coalitions are asked to decide on the priority needs of the children within their areas and the activities that they would like to be involved in to provide for the needs. The Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, Goelama programme provides funding, support and advice to these programmes. Goelama seeks to develop economic links between poor communities and the centres of wealth and to help the coalitions to obtain other funding and resources for their programmes.

Goelama also advocates for better services from the relevant authorities; for support from the private sector and the more affluent communities within South Africa for children in vulnerable communities; and for similar community based support programmes for children in other areas of the country.

In the three years of work on the ground the organisation has made these observations:

Church based groups seem to be best positioned to support families and children.

Community champion are critical in sustaining any development activity on the ground.

Grass root organisations are far more sophisticated in terms of their ability to collect and use data. For example, the best data on children was found in the most rural of all communities where the women had the least education but asked the right questions. In these communities children were accounted for individual and household bases. The organisation knew that it was always tracking the same child.

NGO groups, not based in the community, while adding value often were not able to collect data especially on the tracking of children. The question of whether we were tracking the same child in various systems.

NGO groups often failed to mobilise community leadership and therefore community resources. There was a clear value difference.

Duplication between and among service providers inhibited development. There was not enough synergy among research groups, NGOs and often Universities.

Universities were often reliable partners but like most agencies they also often fail to bring information back to communities.

a. Smart Start Programme

In 1993, Governor James B. Hunt Jr. and the North Carolina general assembly passed legislation creating the Smart Start program to ensure that every child should come to school healthy and ready to learn. Smart Start provides high-quality comprehensive early childhood education, family support, and health care. The state invested \$57 million in Smart Start in 1995, and the private sector contributed over \$14 million in funds and services.

The North Carolina Partnership for Children is a public-private entity created to support and guide the initiative and to build local capacity to sustain investments in young children. The partnership serves as an information clearinghouse and as a provider of technical assistance to Smart Start councils operating in thirty-two counties. Through local Smart Start councils, parents and community, church, and business leaders are creating programs tailored to the needs of local children and families. The Partnership has developed a comprehensive technical assistance plan to strengthen the capacity and sustainability of the local Smart Start councils.

It also plans to expand the initiative to twelve more counties beginning in July 1996. Small capacity-building grants will be made to the councils to work on program development and implementation, community mobilization, and financial and organizational development. To strengthen program development at the local level, the partnership will work with communities to expand high-quality early child care and education, preventive health services, and family support programs and to establish well-defined outcome measures for public accountability purposes. To promote the sustainability of Smart Start councils, the partnership will assist in establishing management policies, fundraising plans, and public awareness campaigns at the community level. Electronic networks will be used to facilitate the sharing of information and ideas among the local councils.

- b. The North Carolina Partnership for Children is a public-private entity created to support and guide the initiative and to build local capacity to sustain investments in young children.

6. Towards a better policy environment: Strengthening communities and enriching advocacy strategies

The challenge to use available resources to support communities in a sustainable manner remains a major challenge. Grass root organisation needs support of other institutions. The critical issue is how to best support without taking over. It is not in the interest of any of us to own community development. The Ford Foundation is one of the agencies that is beginning to lead the way to finding alternatives. There is an obvious unease with the manner in which communities are supported and the control of the development agenda. Who is driving development has implications for who is accountable for results. Many development practitioners work in hierarchically structured environments where development practice is not only NGO driven, but driven also by a donor agenda. Planning, monitoring and evaluation are consumed by the need to be accountable 'upwards'²¹. It is therefore encouraging that donors are struggling with the same issues. Hopefully they will not find answers and too quickly change practice without preparing the NGO/CBO sector, which seems to be lagging behind in this discourse.

The new approach, which presently carries many labels, community driven; asset building and others, fundamentally advocates for sustainability and time bound but focused interventions the key element lies with working with what already exists. In many ways it would be a major paradigm shift. It will shift development practice and policy away from the Problem solving model. McKnight and Kretzman²² challenge the well intentioned efforts of actors-NGOs, Universities ETC- that have focused on the needs, problems and deficiencies of poor communities and the emergence of a layer of agencies with a problem solving mission. They rightfully argue that the consequences of a need/problem based approach can be devastating; Leadership that denigrates the community in order to attract resources, and people in these communities internalising a view of

²¹ Building Community from the Inside Out: Asset Based Community Development(ABCD)

²² Building the Community Inside out...

themselves as incapable of initiating positive change. Communities become more and more reliant on outsiders with devastating impact on community organisation, community rhythm and faith in itself. Finally it is argued that these approaches deny the breadth and depth of community wisdom which regards problems-and the community's own problem solving capacities-are tightly intertwined.

It must be understood that this discussion does not intend to say there is no role for professional CSOs but that there is a need to align practice and resource allocations in order to respond fully to the mission of the Development sector. The sector therefore needs to redefine its relationship with the people it serves.

The World Bank in discussing Community Driven Development identified ten principles to guide policy formulation and program design. It is important to briefly discuss some of these principles:

- The establishment of an enabling environment through relevant institutional reforms. This principle is evidenced in a North Carolina Programme Smart Start, which is discussed below.
- Communities should have access to sufficient information to weigh trade offs. This information is often not made available to communities and if it made available it is not translated both in terms of constructs and language.
- It is important that communities make financial or other commitments to the work in the community. With their own money in their project there is a higher level of accountability and ownership.

- Insuring gender inclusion so that women are not left out of important decisions that often impact on their families.
- Of critical importance is an investment in an exit strategy. This strategy must be agreed upon by all stakeholders²³

Suggested way forward

There is an obvious need to further investigate a more community-based mode of grant making. The key issue remains the challenge of reaching children and their families. In particular it will be important to investigate:

- The nature of NGO/CBO interface with community leadership and networks.
- The role of community churches as agents for development, community organising and advocacy.
- Strengths and Assets of the communities where the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund is implementing its community/family based programmes
- The level to which CSO are ready for a discourse and a possibility of changing approaches.
- The possibility of extending the role of Churches

Conclusions:

This discussion paper will be further explored in a full masters programme with a local South African University.

²³ EADVISOR@worldbank.org