# A SURVEY OF NON GOVERNMENTAL, ALTERNATE SECTOR ACTIVITY IN SOUTH AFRICA.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION.

A survey of non governmental activity, alternate to that of the government and the formal business sector, is a more useful way of broadly examining "project" work in South Africa. Indeed, even the term "project work" could be quite misleading as most indigenous NGO's are increasingly opting for a more integrated, holistic (or programme approach) to their activity.

NGO activity can at present be classified into 3 main "intention" categories:

## 2. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF S.AFRICAN NGO ACTIVITY.

2.1 MORAL AMELIORATION. These are projects or programmes designed to give moral and humane support to people who have suffered political, economic and social injustices.This is done through purely humanitarian and welfare support. Most such activities have honestly declared welfarist intentions and make no pretensions to being developmental or achieving anything more than alleviating immediate suffering. Of necessity therefore, such programmes have short term objectives and life-spans.

2.2 "ENCLAVE" DEVELOPMENT. These are programmes that, whether by design or default, provide upliftment, be it educational,economic, social or political, only to its own specified target group. This kind of activity, some very effective and efficient in its own right, lacks the capacity for any "multiplier" benefit to the broader society. Programmes in this category are characterised by being constantly caught in the "shifting grounds" brought about by rapid changes.

Although developmental in intention, these programmes lack the vital capacity for long term strategic development as the needs of their target groups , and the consequent methodology, are constantly being overtaken by events. They are further characterised by the need for continuously high inputs and with very little measurable outputs.Its rhetoric invariably emphasises "process over product."

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## 2.3 "FACILITATIVE" or "GENERATIVE" DEVELOPMENT.

These are programmes that generate activity which has an impact beyond its own target group. It starts off, ofcourse, with activity within a clearly specified target group, but is characterised at inception by a facilitative nature that stimulates the capacity for self-organisation within the target group. As opposed to "enclave" activity generative development is not inwardly intended, and by the very nature of its organisational form , is almost compelled to "expand" beyond its initial target group. Such programmes have the following characteristics :

- requires external resources solely to supplement its own and to increase or create the capacity for viable external generation. ; usually has the capacity to generate activity with or without external resources, no matter how small the scale.
- starts off with goals that are measurable and is usually geared towards identifiable ouputs (bananas, water, more educated people, etc. There is a firm intention whatever the activity.)
- has relatively long-term horisons which are created by the self interest of the target group. Although not usually so sharply articulated, has the primary intention of *improving the quality of life of the participants. This becomes the "uncontainable" element that drives the programme towards external growth (the need to turn "products" into profitable entities; survivalism becomes self generating productivity.)*
- *has an holistic approach, building and harnessing community welfare elements such as health needs, culture, etc in support of its primary productive goals.*

## 3. SECTORIAL SURVEY.

*Much of the NGO activity in South Africa falls into categories 2.1 (Moral amelioration/welfare) and 2.2 ("Enclave" development.) This is understandable in that the political climate for transforming activity into the third and possibly most desirable activity is only recently and slowly unfolding. The following "survey" is not intended to be judgmental of the organisation active in these fields , but a comment on the difficult and daunting task faced by such organisations.*

## 3.1  EDUCATION

Undoubtedly because of the crises in education most NGO work is reactive and driven by crisis needs. Whether in responding to the need to provide supplementary tuition to Black matric students, or in grappling with failure rates at tertiary level or in trying to address the severe shortage of basic management skills among blacks, there is an almost overwhelmingly "enclave" approach. The crush of numbers and the sheer scope of the problem prevents any coherent, reflective attempt to develop longer term strategies.

The National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC),is one of the few organisation trying to break out out of the crisis syndrome. It has been handed a "poisoned chalice" by the present regime, and faces a daunting task. It still has to demonstrate a capacity to set its own priorities and plan strategically without becoming the present regime's crutch.

With the exception therefore of the NECC to some extent and of SACHED (which is increasingly becoming in-stitutionalised and less "alternate") the other NGO's in the field of education is in a truly parlous state. Adult educa-tion, literacy training , "enrichment" programmes all seem to suffer from a paralysis of orientation.


## 3.2  HEALTH CARE

As with Education, NGO's in this field have to contend with the shameful legacy of apartheid's wilful neglect. Ac-tivity is polarised between that of attempting to develop alternate ("progressive") policies to that of the present regime and that of "mobilising" health workers in par-ticular. Major NGO's such as NAMDA are accepting respon-sibility for dealing with problems not of their making. This is activity that assumes responsibility without authority.

There appears to be very little coherent planning within the NGO sector to help communities deal with an increasing breakdown in essential health services. There is certainly no visible plan to break out of the narrow sectorial focus of NGO's.


## 3.3 YOUTH  &  WOMEN,

Considering that these two sectors constitute the majority among the most marginalised whether in rural areas, established urban areas, squatter camps and informal settle-ments the almost total absence of programmes that address the questions of youth unemployment, "underskilling", crime and homelessness is frightening. Among women, the situation is equally bad, with direct gender issues related to work

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opportunities, illiteracy, health care etc being insig-
nificantly adressed. Most activity in the area of youth and
women are confined to partisan political mobilisation, with
the delivery of programmes that adress a decline in the
quality of life a secondary issue.


### 3.3  CULTURE.

This has been defined as the biggest growth area in
the anti-apartheid industry. With few exceptions, activity
is enclave and even welfarist with very little resources
being directed at the critical need to support integrated
community development, the socialisation of the newly ur-
banised, developing new interpretations of the historical
process that shaped the country or of contributing towards
the development of a reshaped education system. the list of
critical objectives not being adressed is endless and again
points to a crisis of orientation.

### 3.4  MEDIA.

With the exception of the NEW NATION, very few media
initiatives have a survival potential let alone that of be-
coming generatively development. Most newspapers are highly
subsidised with static circulation.       The need for
rationalisation must be recognised so that resources can be
concentrated on viable initiatives and not diffused waste-
fully. The need for information also fills a social need and
at local level, low cost regional "newsletters" can be
developed with community support. Modern technology can be
utilised but not the tendency for extravagant modern capital
spending.

### 3.4  CO-OPERATIVE AND OTHER INCOME GENERATING VENTURES.

Although co-ops have a long history of failure, these
are mostly due to misconception and lack of management
skills, the most critical being marketing skills. If it can
be recognised that despite its deficiencies,( or because of
it!) South Africa is not a barter or subsistence economy,
then co-op ventures can become viable. Provided what is
produced can be sold competitively and at at a surplus, co-
ops have good potential.
Small agricultural and animal farming also has huge, un-
tapped potential, although not so much in its capacity to
absorb people and directly create new jobs, it has the
potential to stimulate the economic environment around it,
particular in the manufacture of small goods, transportation
and commercial distribution.

What is called the "informal" sector is however hugely over-estimated in its potential. At present such activity can at maximum, it is estimated, only generate one third of the income of the formal sector and thus has only a "survival" impact. In this latter category, organisations such as Get Ahead Foundation which was set up to stimulate the "informal sector" has to charge 28% interest on loans it makes to small business initiatives ; this is an indication of the weakness of the sector and not so much of an individual organisation.

There are however initiatives that have a "combinational" if not yet a fully integrated approach to income generation programmes and deserve scrutiny as possible models:

The Maputaland NGO Development Association in Natal, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) co-operatives, the ITSIDU INSTITUTE near Elim in the Transvaal and the Healdtown Rural Development Programme in the Eastern Cape.

## 4. SOME CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS.

Although all the aforegoing seems to paint a dismal picture of NGO work in South Africa it as an assessment based on realism not pessimism. Most of the problems faced by NGOs in the various sectors is a result of having to make massive transformations in their goals and modus operandi in a very short period of time. Although many will not "make" the transformation from welfarist/ enclave activity to that of facilitators of, in short, the ability of local communities to organise themselves, there a great many that can.

The most significant obstacles (and opportunities) faced are :

### 1. THE ALMOST TOTAL LACK OF A DEVELOPMENT CADRE.

What is needed is a corp of skilled community based people with the conceptual, communicative and organisation skills to guide local community initiatives, help "unlock" local resources and identify other resources (financial and human) that local resources can successfully coalesce with. Perhaps leadership development programmes should be formulated and existing ones reoriented so that emphasis is placed on development skills and not directly party political skills. Here, youth and women have great potential.

*2. LACK OF A DEVELOPMENT CAPITAL FUND.*

*Funding arrangements, in scale, criteria and deployment, is unable to provide access to funding in a flexible and reasonable way. Nor are most donors able to commit funding for the periods essential for the unfolding genuine genera- tive development programmes. A suggestion would be to bring together major local and international donors and explore the creation of a non-punitive revolving credit fund with flexible rates of interest and repayment.*

*3. AN "UNCREATIVE" CLIMATE FOR NGO DEVELOPMENT WORK EXISTS.*

*NGO's still operate in a climate of uncertainty and of- ten wasteful competition with the state and political en- tities . A more creative climate needs to be created by:*
*- placing development firmly on the negotiations agenda. The present government must be made to stop its retreat from providing essential social services and shift the burden elsewhere.*
*- a clear "division of labour" must be agreed upon. The present regime, and those who aspire to forming future ones should be encouraged to hold discourse with NGO's so that a non-confrontational climate can be created. For example, if the Kwa-Zulu administration can be persuaded to proceed with its nature conservation programme without removing masses of people (studies have shown that people and nature can live in harmony) then NGO's would be able able to devote much more of its resources to the flexible, decentralised forms of development that has already proven successful in Natal.*
*Furthermore, the substitutive role that many NGO's are forced to play would be unnecessary.*
*- remove development from the party-political arena. Al- low local initiatives, and indeed support such initiatives, no matter "whose cadres" are the initiators ; so long as the initiative is transparently of the people and designed to generate development in favour of local people.*
*- create a policy framework that would enable indigenous NGOs to work in alliance even with some of the existing para-statals ; spurning scarce resource is a form of politi- cal naivety (even false virginity) that those who act as in- terlocutors on behalf of poor communities can ill afford.*