

**PROMOTING INDIGENOUS NGOS AS INSTRUMENTS  
OF  
POPULAR PARTICIPATION**

*A Paper Prepared for the  
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in the Recovery and Development Process  
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## PROMOTING INDIGENOUS NGOS AS INSTRUMENTS OF POPULAR PARTICIPATION

### Introduction

In discussing "Promoting Indigenous NGOs as Instruments of Popular Participation" it is essential to define or to articulate our understanding of strategic operative words or terms. In this case, these include "people", "popular", "indigenous NGOs" and "popular participation". And since "popular participation" has to be contextualised, we shall also say something on the purpose of popular participation: the "recovery and development process in Africa". However, rather than define these terms in a dry manner, probably at the beginning of this paper, we propose to contextually explain the strategic terms in an organic way, as we deal with them in the course of this paper.

### Starting from the Beginning

For sometime now, a big "discovery" seems to have been made or stumbled on: "the critical importance of people's participation in the development process", if Africa is to "recover" and even more so, to "develop". By obvious implication, the "people" are not participating, at least not adequately participating.

But it should be pointed out that people have always wanted to work, to participate in the activities which are essential for their survival, as a basis for working for their thrival. People enjoy taking decisions which affect their lives now and in the future. It is only natural. And when we say "people are not participating", we should only say so in a specific sense by specifying which people and what it is that they are not participating in. This can only be so, since the very existence of people is itself proof that they are participating in a number of activities which make it possible for them to exist. For people "not to participate" in matters which affect their lives and well-being, it must be for a good reason: either they are denied the possibility to participate or it is worthless to participate, or both.

So why don't people participate in Africa's "recovery and development process"? Or do they?

The issue of Africa's development is a historical question which must be handled so. But since we are now concerned with Africa's recovery, it is important to establish what it is that Africa must "recover" from before "development" can occur.

## AFRICA: Recovery From What?

Africa's ills have been popularly explained to have started with the continent's colonisation, at the turn of the last century. This is wrong. Africa's woes are much deeper and go further in history.

It all started with Africa's contact with Europe during the 15th century, i.e. about 500 years ago. Before the 15th century there was little contact between the continents of Europe, America and Africa. Most of Europe's contact with Africa was with North Africa, along the Mediterranean coast. But as Europe emerged out of the stagnation of the middle ages, there was increased production. With increased production came the increase in trade and commerce. This in turn stimulated the demand for money and commodities. The search intensified for all sorts of commodities, especially gold and silver, which in Europe were already playing the role of money, as a measure of wealth and for carrying out international trade.

Europe's search for commodities was fuelled further by the fact that Europe was and still is relatively poor in natural resources. And so began a series of voyages by adventurers, pirates, robbers and traders backed by the kings of Spain, Portugal, England and the Netherlands. These included people like Vasco Da Gama, Columbus, Magellan, Cook, Francis Drake, and Walter Raleigh.

On contact with Africa, the Portuguese discovered great wealth on the West African coast: a settled people with an integrated, endogamous, African-lead and African-driven economy based on agriculture, fishery, salt-boiling, earthenware, mining (gold and iron) and weaving. Further south along the West coast, the Bantu tribes of the Congo kingdom were skilful in working metals, including copper and iron. They wove mats and articles of clothing from raffia tissues. They domesticated several animals: pigs, sheep, chickens, and in some districts cattle. They also had the hoe and the axe. (see Yash Tandon, 1989).

At first contact between Europe and Africa was peaceful. The most common practice in the relationship was cheating, for example, exchanging a couple of bottles of gin for a basketful of gold. But all this changed with the discovery of gold mines in Mexico and Peru. The demand for disciplined labour to work in the mines enormously grew as a result of the gold discovery. This labour could not be mobilised from within Mexico or Peru, nor could it be procured from further afield in a peaceful way.

Slave trading had been going on prior to the gold discoveries, but these discoveries introduced a qualitative change to the whole practice. Walter Rodney explained:

*When the Europeans reached the Americas they recognized its enormous potential in gold and silver and tropical produce. But that potential could not be made a reality without adequate labour supplies. The indigenous Indian population could not withstand new European diseases such as small pox nor could they bear the organised toil of slave plantations and slave mines, having barely emerged from the hunting stage. Therefore, they turned to the nearest continent, Africa, which incidentally had a population accustomed to settled agriculture and disciplined labour in many spheres.*

And so started the massive capture of Africans and their transportation to the Americas in captivity. Although the exact figures cannot be established, Africa lost an estimated 100 million able-bodied men and women through what has come to be euphematically known as "slave trade". A look at the populations of the continents of Africa, Asia and Europe tells part of the story. Although the living conditions in the three continents were not radically different, the population of Africa stagnated at around 100 million for three centuries, while that of the other two continents more than doubled.

The estimated population growth in Africa, Asia and Europe between 1650 and 1900 was as follows (in millions):

YEAR	1650	1750	1850	1900
CONTINENT				
AFRICA	100	100	100	120
EUROPE	103	144	274	423
ASIA	257	437	656	857

**Note:** Africa's population does not start to rise until after the abolition of slavery and slave trade.

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But then slave trade did not merely mean the loss of numbers. The methods which the slavers used bear this out. Take for example what one of the slaver agents of King Leopold said, as recorded by the king's biographer, Ludwig Baner:

*S.S. Van Kerkhoven is coming down the Nile and will demand 1500 porters. Unlucky niggers, I can hardly bear to think of them. I am asking myself how on earth I shall be able to hunt up so large a number ... Marshes, hunger, exhaustion. How much blood will be shed because of this transport. Three times already, I have had to make war upon the chiefs who could not help me to get the men I needed ... If a chief refuses, that means war with modern firearms on one side against spears and javelin on the other.*

It is for this reason that Walter Rodney concluded:

*... on the whole, the process by which captives were obtained on the African soil was not trade at all. It was through warfare, trickery, banditry and kidnapping. When one tries to measure the effect of European slave trading on the African continent, it is essential to realise that one is measuring the effect of social violence rather than trade in any normal sense of the word.*

Thus slave trade seriously dented the political power and sovereignty of the African people, disrupted their economy, social cohesion and social institutions - it stagnated African development and generally put the African peoples on the continent and in the diaspora on the defensive and self-preservation line.

One way to understand the depth of injury to the African people is by looking at who was behind (and therefore benefited from) slave trade. The monarchs of Europe were directly involved. For example, the Spanish monarch who considered West Africa to be their exclusive sphere of slave action, was alarmed when English traders started to invade this area. He instructed his ambassador in London to intervene with the English Government to persuade them to keep out of West Africa. The Spanish ambassador wrote back to his monarch:

*... who they seek in Guinea most are slaves to take to the West Indies. I will use all effort to prevent them going, but the greed of these people is great and they are not only merchants in these adventures but secretly many of the Queen's Council.*

And when the monarch is involved, where can the subjects turn for redress?!

Yet another way of sharply understanding the depth of the wounds inflicted on the African continent by slave trade is by looking at the benefits of its perpetrators. This Eric Williams has brilliantly explained as follows:

*The triangular trade gave a triple stimulus to British industry. The Negroes were purchased with British manufactures; transported to the plantation, they produced sugar, cotton, indigo, molasses and other tropical products, the processing of which created new industries in England; while the maintenance of the negroes and their owners on the plantations provided another market for British industry, New England Agriculture and Newfoundland fisheries. By 1750 there was hardly a trading or manufacturing town in England which was not in some way connected with the triangular or direct colonial trade. The profits obtained provided one of the main streams of that accumulation of capital in England which financed the industrial revolution.*

Another way of understanding the benefits to the perpetrators of slave trade is by examining the possible loss to be suffered should slavery and slave trade be abolished. The arguments of Bishop Maury of France give us a clear idea of what slavery and slave trade meant to those who benefited. When the abolition of slave trade was proposed in the French National Assembly, Bishop Maury defended slave trade thus:

*If you were to lose each year more than 200 million livres that you get from your (slave) colonies, if you had not the exclusive trade with your colonies to feed your manufacturers, to maintain your navy, to keep your agriculture going, to repay your imports, to provide for your luxury needs, to advantageously balance your trade with Europe and Asia, then I say it clearly, the Kingdom would be irretrievably lost.*

### **The Withering away of Slavery**

The aristocracy under whom slavery and slave trade flourished, and the slave merchants who reaped the profits had every reason to ensure their continuation. Under the aegis of their "success" emerged a new economic force, capitalism; and a new class which spearheaded it, the bourgeoisie. Soon the aristocracy

became a serious impediment to the advancement of capitalism and the bourgeoisie. They interfered with the circulation of goods through all manner of restrictions, for example, taxes and regulations on weights and measures. Further, the aristocracy kept the population in the rural areas on the land as serfs, and that way denied the industrialists the labour their factories needed. What is more, by controlling the land, the aristocracy were able to dictate the price of food and raw materials, and that way raise the industrialists' costs of production. This, naturally ate into the bourgeoisie's profit margin.

As the bourgeoisie grew stronger, a political show-down with the aristocracy became inevitable. In the battles which ensued, the slave merchants sided with the aristocracy. It thus became necessary for the bourgeoisie to take on the merchants too. And since the slave merchants were among the most powerful, it became essential for the bourgeoisie to attack slavery and slave trade. This had two-pronged advantages: to weaken the economic power of the merchant classes; and to undermine the merchants' political support for the aristocracy.

In the United States the confrontation was between the slave owners and planters and the industrialists. The industrialists wanted the slaves to be "freed" so that they could enter into "free contracts" to work in factories.

In relation to Africa, the industrial and financial interests found that there was more to gain by leaving the African on the continent, instead of driving him into slavery across the Atlantic, or elsewhere. The financiers and industrialists were interested in raw materials, markets for their products and spheres for investment. But slaves cannot constitute a market, since their labour is not paid for. Moreover, slaves, since they have to be fed, tended to push up the costs of plantation production. So that the cost of sugar production, for example, would have to include the cost of the slave's upkeep and the planter's overheads. Whereas if the African was left "free", his upkeep would be his responsibility and he would employ "free" family labour to produce raw materials, while, in addition, constituting a market for the industrial commodities. The opening up of mines and factories in Africa made the "freedom from slavery" of the African even more imperative.

Needless to say, the abolition of slavery and slave trade was carried out behind complex issues and slogans, some of them supposedly lofty. But behind every complexity there is a simplicity. Slavery as an economic force simply run out of historical steam and had to give way to capitalism and colonialism.

## The Colonisation of Africa

And so it was that before Africa could recover from slavery and slave trade, colonialism was at its door. Africa's colonisation was formalised between the European imperialist powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884. Colonisation constituted the forcible annexation of African territory, the subjugation of independent African peoples to the political domination of the European powers, for the purposes of economic domination and exploitation of African labour and natural resources.

At the turn of the last century when Africa was colonised, the continent was well-organised in kingdoms, chiefdoms, etc. with clear political leadership and authority. The colonialists therefore could not impose their political domination without first breaking the political power and authority of the African kings, chiefs and the people. Secondly, the colonialists did not want to impose political domination for its own sake; for them political domination was to pave the way for the economic domination and exploitation of African labour, to grow cash crops, work in mines or naked forced labour on colonial projects.

The African peoples, kings and chiefs could not voluntarily accept the imposition of colonial, political and economic domination. Indeed they employed all available resources to resist. But the stakes were high for colonialism. They employed all available instruments of force and trickery, until they achieved their objective. The cost to Africa was high. Political leadership and authority were disrupted; the endogamous economies were destroyed; social and cultural institutions were disrupted; people's technology and knowledge were destroyed etc.

Coming hot on the heels of slavery and slave trade, colonialism proved to be more devastating, leaving no stone unturned. This is how a Uganda nationalist newspaper put it in 1949:

*When Britain suppressed the existing slave trade, it seems she devised instead the plan of buying slaves but bought them instead in their own native country ... The slave trade was abolished in one way and then introduced in another but the old slave trade was better because only a few (sic) were taken and those who remained home lived in peace, but the modern slave trade includes children and women ...*

In the Portuguese colonies the situation was so bad that not even the Inspector General of the Portuguese colonies could hide the reality. This is how he described the state of the colonised peoples:

*... forced labour is in some ways worse than simple slavery. Under slavery after all the native is bought as an animal; his owner prefers him to remain as fit as a horse or an ox - yet here (in Angola) the native is not bought, he is hired from the store, although he is called a free man. And his employer cares little. If he sickens or dies, his employer will simply ask for another.*

### Independence and Neo-Colonialism

Since the objective of political domination was primarily economic domination, colonialism imposed the capitalist relations of production. African technology and industry were destroyed so as to turn the continent into a market for European, American and later Japanese industry. This ensured that as long as the African economy was dominated by American, European and Japanese financiers, there would be no independent technological and industrial base. No strong capitalist class could emerge; there was no market for this to happen since Africa was the market for imperialism. Any capitalists who emerged were weak, without an independent life of their own, and therefore only able to survive under the shadow and protection of imperialism. The business fortunes of this class of capitalists (compradores) is directly linked to the fortunes of imperialism, i.e. the continuation of political and economic domination of Africa.

But all this did not and could not stop Africa's struggle for independence and freedom. The real force which spearheaded the struggle for independence was a weak working class. The working class could not have been strong since it was based on a weak industrial base. It was not in the interests of colonialism to build a strong industrial base in Africa. In addition to the weak working class, there was an equally weak poor peasantry, dominated by a relatively small rich peasantry. Sandwiched between these two classes was an urban, intellectual middle class, usually dominated by the children of the local colonial agents and collaborators.

Needless to say, the different classes organised themselves to push for their interests. But since the workers' and poor peasants' interests are objectively hostile to foreign domination, the colonial masters persecuted them and ensured

that no viable workers' or poor peasants' organisation was established. On the other hand, political parties of the petty bourgeois middle class were given careful "encouragement" and "guidance" to such an extent that they were presented as "national parties".

The reasons for the colonial support to the petty bourgeois political organisations are clear. The petty bourgeois grievance against colonialism was the discrimination which did not allow them to occupy the relatively highly paid jobs in the colonial civil service as these were reserved for the Europeans. The petty bourgeoisie actually yearned for filling the places of the colonial governors and the other intermediary classes. A tiny intellectual group which emerged at the leadership of a colonially organised and infiltrated labour movement also shared the same ambitions.

It is this class which "demanded" and was "granted independence". Some measure of political autonomy was given to the intermediary classes, while the colonialists retained the real power, i.e. the control of the economy through neo-colonial/capitalist property relations - and that way the ultimate power to take political decisions. In essence, the colonial state as established by imperialism to oppress and exploit the African peoples remained intact at independence: the army, the police, the prisons, the judiciary, the civil service, the financial institutions, standing orders, etc. Even the colonial personnel were also inherited. This was clearly possible because there was no principal contradiction between the "heroes of independence" and imperialism. Those who doubted the treachery of neo-colonialism quickly discovered truth to be stranger than fiction.

After presiding over one such neo-colonial state for more than 15 years, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, obviously writing from a position of inside knowledge, revealed the fraud of "independence" under imperialism:

*The reality of neo-colonialism quickly becomes obvious to a new African government which tries to act on economic matters in the betterment of its own masses. For such a government immediately discovers that it inherited the power to make laws, to treat with foreign governments and so on but did not inherit effective power over economic developments in its own country. Indeed it often discovers that there is no such thing as a national economy at all. Instead there exists in its land various economic activities which are directed at external needs, and which are run in the interest of external economic powers. Neo-colonialism is a very real and very severe limitation on national*

*sovereignty. The total amount of credit and its distribution to the different sectors of the economy, for example, is determined by the banking system. The persons or groups who control the bank therefore have a very fundamental, almost deciding effect. The local agents of foreign banks may well be willing to cooperate with the national governments' priorities; but in the last resort their loyalty is and must be to their overseas employers. In case of dispute at top policy level, the government will not be able to enforce its decisions ... In economic matters, therefore, our countries are effectively being governed by people who have marginal interest in our affairs if any, and even that only in so far as it affects their own well-being. That in fact is the meaning and practice of neo-colonialism.*

### **The "African Crisis"**

What today is popularly referred to as the "African Crisis" is therefore in reality the result of the cumulative plunder and rape of the African continent first under slavery and slave trade; then colonialism, and now under neo-colonialism. The effects have been most telling. Between 1982 and 1986, for example, 200 million Africans in 24 countries suffered the effects of drought; 35 million were at risk of famine; 10 million were displaced and left their homes in search of food; 1 million died in Ethiopia; 4 million children died every year of malnutrition in the whole of Africa.

Less than 30% of the African population has access to safe drinking water. 10%-30% of the children died before the age of five. Educational expenditure fell from \$41 per capita in 1980 to \$28 in 1985. Illiteracy is on the increase; industrial production has been on the decline, etc, etc. The only area where dramatic growth has been recorded is that of the debt. Africa's debt now stands at over \$200 billion.

The general economic situation has deteriorated so much that the economic well-being of all, except for a tiny section of the compradores is threatened. The middle class who used to lead a reasonably stable and safe life are now faced with aggressive proletarianisation. Labour has never been so cheap in Africa. In Uganda, for example, a senior university professor is paid the monthly salary of \$10 - itself inadequate for a day's living wage! Amidst all this, the World Bank and IMF are "satisfied" that Africa has a "bright future", if only she continues to implement the policies and directives handed to them.

At this moment in the history of neo-colonial oppression, to achieve its objectives, imperialism has to dump and to pauperise even its class allies, the middle class intellectuals and businessmen. And if imperialism has reached a stage where it has to be hostile to its class allies, what hope is there for the workers and poor peasants, the vast majority of the African peoples?

### The Political Implications of Neo-Colonial Oppression

The repressive and brutal nature of the neo-colonial economic domination is clear for all to see. What is equally clear is that this repression cannot be voluntarily accepted by the people. Just as they resisted slavery and slave trade, and later colonialism, the African peoples are now locked in serious battles with neo-colonialism. As the neo-colonial nature of African regimes unfolds they have less and less popular support from amongst the people; and the only way to manage is through the use of force, trickery and deception. When the crisis heats up it is usually necessary for the army to come out on the streets, dismiss the civilian regime and promise to "stop a bad situation from getting worse". The result is that most of Africa's states are under one form of military rule or another. Where and when you have elections this is because they are an administrative device to legitimise continued neo-colonial domination. The people therefore cannot wield power in a neo-colonial state; nor are they the source of the power of a neo-colonial regime. The real source of power lies with the international financiers like the IMF and World Bank. This is how D.W. Nabudere explains it:

*By controlling the national economy ... it (finance capital) is able also to control the national market and both these economic powers give foreign capital a fantastic corruptive influence over national economic, social and cultural life. The huge commissions, discounts and profits paid to the local agents representing these foreign economic interests act as the economic basis for corrupting even the most "honest" and "national" of the native bourgeoisie and their representatives. The whole state bureaucracy which is used by foreign capital to issue them with import and export licences (for "ten per cent") is bedeviled with corruption ...*

The benefits of neo-colonial domination to finance capital and the compradores explains why the threat (or actual use) of force, deception, trickery, manoeuvre etc have to be employed to keep it going. It should also explain why today African governments are turning into a creed the withdrawal of services and subsidies which had been the hallmark of good government; services and subsidies by which governments usually claimed legitimacy. This is the only way Africa's wealth can continue to be siphoned off to the North.

### People's Participation in the Development Process under Conditions of Oppression

Right from the time of slavery and colonialism, and now neo-colonialism, the African peoples have no doubt participated in the "development" process. The critical question to address really is "participated in whose development?"

Under slavery and slave trade more than 100 million Africans participated, many of them to the point of death. But this participation did not benefit the African people; it benefited the European merchants, planters and monarchs - and to a negligible extent African slave middlemen. Under colonialism and neo-colonialism nobody is spared, all the African peoples have to participate. But again participation not for their benefit, but for the benefit of finance capital. The African peoples participate in neo-colonial "development" under duress, through the coercion of "market and other forces". It is the participation of victims.

However, during the last 500 years the African peoples, in addition to participating in the oppressor's development, have maintained and developed their own technology, knowledge, philosophy, science, medicine, organisations, institutions and networks for their own survival. It was on the basis of these people's organisations that the African peoples mobilised against colonialism, culminating in the "granting of independence". But in the last 30 years or so, flag independence has exhausted itself. At the economic level, it cannot deliver the goods promised at independence. On the contrary these "goods" have been withdrawn, are about to be withdrawn or have been seriously cut back; for example free education, free medical service, road construction and maintenance, employment and living wages, agricultural inputs and cash-crop prices etc. Economically, the only thing a neo-colonial state can assure us of is that tomorrow will be worse than today. People are getting poorer. In many countries the only growth area of the economy has been the army and "security" services,

so much so that in some instances, where the government once maintained a school, there is now a police post or an army barracks. But in some situations even such army barracks cannot be maintained, the soldiers are expected to be "imaginative" in providing for their maintenance. In essence the neo-colonial state is in decay and in some cases is withering away.

Economically then, the African neo-colonial state either does not command the material base to maintain itself or the national integrity of the country it presides over, or else is galloping in that direction.

Politically, the African neo-colonial state cannot stand any open challenge and therefore is incapable of providing moral, philosophical or political leadership. This is precisely because the neo-colonial state, including the official trade unions, cannot consistently and resolutely stand with the people in their struggle against foreign domination; and therefore the struggle for democracy, national unity, national independence, social progress and international solidarity.

### The People's Response to the Decay of the Neo-Colonial State

As the neo-colonial state decays, and abandons its responsibilities to the people, on the directives of the IMF and the World Bank, the people have had to respond by organising themselves for survival and self-preservation, while figuring out long term solutions. This explains the rapid growth of peasants and workers associations, welfare organisations, mutual aid societies, harambee groups and the indigenous African development organisations and NGOs.

Today when we talk about government, it is as if this is an ancient institution against which everything must be defined, for example non-governmental organisations. But as a matter of fact, government is a relatively new social institution. Historically man has lived longer without government than with government. Without government he organised himself in small participatory civil society units, with the decision-making process as close to those affected as NGOs would wish to dream today. This form of organisation is deeply rooted in Africa, and has passed the test of time, such that when the African is faced with the most serious and deepest issues, of joy or sadness, he turns to native wisdom, technology, medicine, or forms of social organisation. It is this that has enabled him to survive the onslaughts of slavery and colonialism. And again it is to the traditional forms of social organisation that the African peoples have turned in facing the neo-colonial rampage. This means therefore that there is a direct link between the forms of political, economic and social

organisation employed by the African peoples to survive slavery and neo-colonialism and the workers and peasants associations, voluntary development organisations etc. which have been mushrooming in the last decade. It is here that new energies are to be found for the struggle for a self-reliant Africa. In our view, it is this fact which explains, at least in part, the close interest in people's and grassroots organisations.

### **"Popular Participation" in the Context of Present-day Neo-Colonial Development Thinking**

Today the words "people's participation" and "popular participation" are on the lips of a diversity of people, with equally diverse, and sometimes conflicting interests. The UN system talks about "people's participation", and even the World Bank. As such therefore it is necessary to demystify these terms:

#### **(a) Participation as Incorporation**

It should be pointed out that "participation" becomes an issue because certain sections of society, in our present-day world, the majority, have been historically denied the right or possibility to participate in the affairs in which they have a legitimate stake. The denial to participate is possible because those who are excluded do not have the political power or the leverage necessary to win their rights. In the light of a continuing struggle on the part of the oppressed for general and specific rights, those in power tend to look at "participation" as a process for the gradual incorporation of the hitherto excluded sectors of society in some formal processes, for example "participation" in a general election. In such situations, the hitherto excluded participate on the basis of an agenda and issues determined by those in power. Participation in this respect helps to cloud the agenda of the excluded; and to falsely make the exclusive agenda of those in power to be the agenda of society as a whole.

Participation for incorporation is oppressor-conceived, driven and directed. It is intended to give respectability, acceptability and legitimacy to the oppressor's programme.

(b) **Participation as a Methodology**

For some, participation is important in so far as it is conceived as a new methodology, a new technique to achieve old objectives. This view of participation is characteristic of those with the power and resources; for them participation is a means to efficiency and to improve the delivery of a pre-determined service. In this respect participation is typically project-specific, internal to the project and expires at the end of the life of the project. Important elements of this type of participation are "comments" and "advice" - while the power to decide and control firmly remains in the old hands.

(c) **Participation as a Means for Limited Social Action**

This type of participation usually involves a community which organises itself to tackle community problems, for example, water supply, educational facilities, health, etc. An organisation may be formed to facilitate such community action. For such participation, the hitherto excluded will analyze their social reality; identify the needs and problems; draw up a programme to address specific needs and problems; as well as mobilise the required resources, internally and externally.

Characteristic of this type of participation is community-focused and localised action, without the deliberate effort or vision to support neighbouring communities in similar initiatives, let alone a pan African vision, or pan African and global solidarity.

As can be seen, for people to participate on the basis of participation conceived as a basis for incorporation, or a methodology to improve efficiency, or as a means for limited projectist social action, is to participate on the basis of the oppressor's agenda and programme, and therefore to participate as victims.

## **Why is Participation an Issue?**

In our view, participation has become an issue in the context of the search for an answer to man's biggest riddle. Today, man has at his disposal, the material base, the technology and expertise to provide for all the basic human needs of every single person in the world, man, woman and child. Indeed as long ago as 1929 it was estimated that the machine power at that time represented the muscular power of nine billion additional men - or the equivalent of five slaves for every single man, woman and child. But if this is so, why do millions starve to death or die the slow painful death of malnutrition? Why are millions unhoused? Why do millions of women and men who break their backs growing cotton go naked? Why do the people of Angola, with abundant fish resources, die for lack of protein?

In our view this is because of the internationalisation of European, then American and now Japanese economic and political power which enable these powers to turn the peoples of the world, including workers in their own countries, into the slaves of finance capital. The redress of this situation, therefore, means the breaking of the power of imperialism so that the science and technology available to us can be applied for the benefit of the people, instead of servicing the insatiable greed of finance capital. Moreover, international finance capital and the multinational corporation, in so far as they seek to centralise and concentrate, have become outmoded and backward in the face of advanced small-scale technologies, around which people can organise themselves in small participatory units, capable of responding to their needs. It calls for new forms of social organisation so that technological advances are in harmony with social organisation, and that way banish the brutalities being committed against the environment, as well as see the back of bourgeois economics based on the facade of "scarcity".

## **Who is to lead the People's Popular Participation in Africa's Recovery and Development?**

The most reliable people who can work for Africa's recovery from the ravages of slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism, and usher our continent into the age of development are the people who suffer most. These are the workers and poor peasants. This is so for two critical reasons. They are the creators of the wealth of Africa which has been siphoned off to the North for centuries. They are also the ones who can create new wealth under new conditions of independence and self-reliance. Secondly, as a class, the poorest and most oppressed are the

only ones who can prosecute the struggle for the liberation of their continent without asking for privileges and exemptions. It is the workers and poor peasants who can flush out present-day grassroots imperialism by which "new missionaries" under the guise of NGOs, and because they are armed with dollars, seek to do for our villages what we can do for ourselves better. It is the poor who can flush the World Bank and IMF Governors and Nyamparas from our "national" banks, without any hesitation.

But this cannot come about by people participating in the oppressor's programme. As a matter of fact there is nothing "popular" about that; on the contrary, it is unpopular. The recovery and development of Africa can only be possible when people do not merely participate, but actually set the agenda for recovery and development. It is only then that participation becomes people's participation i.e. participation on the basis of an agenda popularly drawn up by the people. It is also the only basis for Africa's recovery and development.

### Who are the People?

In our view, "the people" are all those countries and sectors of society in all the countries of the world, whose social welfare and social progress are impeded by the present international undemocratic order as has evolved since slave trade, by which expertise, technological capacity and capability are ahead, far ahead, of social organisation. They are the countries and sectors of society who are engaged in conscious struggle against hegemonism and imperialism or can be mobilised for such struggle. The corollary is equally true: all those whose social welfare and social progress are assured by the backward, undemocratic social organisation based on domination, and are hostile to a new international democratic order, cannot be part of the people. They are part of the problem and not part of the solution; they cannot possibly spearhead Africa's recovery and development.

In Africa the people would include the workers, poor peasants, patriotic professional bodies, patriotic businessmen, progressive intellectuals, minorities and oppressed nationalities.

### The Way Forward

The way forward for people to set the agenda for the recovery and development of Africa then is to create an environment which is conducive to and supportive of people's initiatives to organise themselves around legitimate issues of concern. While organising separately is inevitable and healthy, it is important

for all people's organisations to have points of and mechanisms for contact and consultation. In other words, it is important for each section of society to articulate their understanding of the crisis as well as chart a way out of it. Yet all the different views must have a point or points of convergence since a durable solution can only be possible through united action, based on a common broad vision. Dialogue therefore becomes critical in the struggles for a free Africa and a new international democratic order. However, true dialogue can only be possible if each of the contending forces, e.g. the workers, peasants, minorities, professional bodies, etc, develop a consciousness and a consistent and coherent outlook and framework for reading the world. This is why the freedom of association is so important. Without it, imperialism will continue to impose its own theoretical and ideological framework for interpreting our history, as well as continue to impose "solutions" to the very problems for which it is responsible.

### The Role of Indigenous NGOs in Popular Participation

Before we postulate the role of indigenous NGOs in popular participation, it is essential to establish what these NGOs are.

What is African and indigenous about NGOs is that they have emerged out of the African peoples' need to respond to the neo-colonial ravages. In the last ten years the growth of African indigenous NGOs has been phenomenal. It has been phenomenal because the growth of African indigenous NGOs has been inversely proportional to the abandonment of social welfare responsibility on the part of the African neo-colonial state. In this sense therefore indigenous NGOs have been a response to the decay of the neo-colonial state at all levels: political, economic, social and moral.

African indigenous NGOs then are those NGOs which emerge to give support to the African people's search for self-reliance. In many situations therefore, where there is despair indigenous NGOs give some hope. They are also organisations whose policy is determined by the African people; and senior programme personnel whose day-to-day decisions and work is likely to influence the orientation of the organisation are African. If such organisation must be registered, it is registered in Africa.

In essence then, an African indigenous NGO must be African conceived, African propelled and African directed at all levels and in totality, i.e. process, policy, management and execution. An indigenous NGO therefore builds on the indigenous people's capacities, capabilities and resources: culture, existing

structures and organisations, technology, skills, leadership, enthusiasm, the spirit of solidarity, the hope for a new future and the determination to work for it. Consciously or otherwise indigenous NGOs arise on a basic premise: namely that the environment which gives rise to a problem also has the elements for its resolution.

In this way then the indigenous NGOs differ from expatriate NGOs for whom the basis of wisdom and power is money; and since they have the money while the African peoples do not, they know what is good for the African peoples. For the expatriate NGOs "professional and technical expertise" is critical to development. And after proclaiming their expatriate staff to be the experts, a claim they vigorously back up with money, it follows that these experts must be at the centre of the commanding heights of development action. Above all, the expatriate NGOs must provide the ideological and philosophical leadership.

For the indigenous NGOs to facilitate popular participation in development, the following action needs to be taken:

#### By the Indigenous NGOs

- (i) It is critical for the indigenous NGOs to realise that only the people themselves can redeem themselves from oppression and deprivation. As indigenous NGOs, the best they can do to alleviate poverty and oppression is to support people's efforts. This they can effectively do by linking their work to social issues and working with and giving support to social movements, people's and grassroots organisations. The indigenous NGOs need to understand and grasp the fact that their long term strength lies in "keeping close" to the people, however enticing the short-term benefits of "keeping close" to the donors might be. For this the indigenous NGOs need to build and renew a cadre of leadership with the intellectual depth, analytical tools, the courage and decisiveness necessary to consistently identify themselves with and seek inspiration and guidance from the people. The cornerstone of the indigenous NGO leadership's intellectual depth lies in the historical and dialectical understanding of the crisis which faces Africa today.
- (ii) The indigenous NGOs' development initiative should not be guided by short-term benefits, but should instead be based on a long-term perspective of the problem at hand.

(iii) As much as possible, indigenous NGO development action should aim at de-linking the African peoples from north-bound, oppressive production. In this, for example, support should be given to food production, instead of to the so-called cash crops.

(iv) The indigenous NGOs should not look at their work only or even mainly as a matter of technical excellence. They need to be increasingly interested in the broad political issues and environment which condition technical work. For example, however sound the educational technical arrangements and provision may be, universal education and universal literacy cannot be achieved under apartheid - any more than a well-fertilised egg can hatch in a refrigerator.

The moral of such reality is that indigenous NGOs need more and more to work for broad people's democratic rights.

(v) To provide a dynamic, solid and self-reliant basis for sustainable development, African NGOs should always ensure that development projects/programmes are based and built on existing natural and human resources, expertise and institutional frameworks. In this regard African NGOs need not only develop their own professional and technical expertise, but also learn to identify other African NGOs with the expertise they might need and to utilise them accordingly.

The following is recommended as a rule of the thumb guide in their search for and utilisation of professional and technical expertise in their work: "When faced with a development task in a community which requires professional or technical expertise look for it within the community. If not available, look for it in the neighbouring community. If not available look elsewhere in the country. If still not available, look at the neighbouring and other countries in your sub-region. If not available, look elsewhere in Africa. If not available go elsewhere in the Third World: Asia, Caribbean and Latin America. If you still cannot find the professional or technical expertise you are looking for, look at the problem at hand; most likely you do not have a problem!"

- (vi) Encourage the formation and strengthening of community-level, people grassroots organisations and give them every support to link up in national-level and wider coalitions.
- (vii) African NGOs should adopt and consistently use an open, democratic method of work.
- (viii) African NGOs should build coalitions for information sharing, strategic planning and building an environment conducive to their solidarity and the mutual support necessary to individually and collectively pursue their mandate. Further, it will be necessary to develop and articulate guidelines and a consensus on relations and working with the people, people's organisations, African governments, Northern and international NGOs, the super powers and other governments of the North.
- (ix) Together African NGOs need to build channels and fora for communication with their governments, and to assure them they are not in competition with them. They also need to avoid being used as cheap delivery systems for government and other organisations.
- (x) African NGOs should realise the importance of research as a tool for developing the "software" of theory so vital to giving direction to the "hardware" of technical development action.
- (xi) The African NGO leadership should avoid being compradiorized, and that way ensure African NGOs do not become another layer of foreign domination.

#### By Northern NGOs

- (i) Unlike the governments of the North (lip service notwithstanding) Northern NGOs need to genuinely and consistently, in thought, word and deed, recognise the sovereignty of the African peoples. At the NGO level we call upon the Northern NGOs in the same way to recognise the African NGOs as the masters of the African continent; and that their positive role in development action in Africa lies only in playing a supportive role to the African NGOs, on the basis of un-manipulated request.

- (ii) Recognise and admit that having considerable material and financial resources at their disposal constitutes a real basis and temptation to engage in hegemonic adventures. We call upon Northern and international NGOs to be consciously vigilant against hegemonism; and in particular desist from using money to take advantage of African NGOs.
- (iii) Resist the pressures and pleasures of playing the role of implementers of the foreign policies of their government.
- (iv) Shun the advantages which may accrue by signing agreements with African governments (behind the backs of African NGOs or in spite of their objections), which agreements weaken the African NGOs.
- (v) Provide financial and material support to African NGOs on a long-term basis and on a programme rather than project basis.
- (vi) Desist from using administrative procedures as a cover for control.
- (vii) Northern and international NGOs should not compete with African NGOs at any level; and in particular at the leadership, programme/project development and implementation levels.
- (viii) Northern and international NGOs should desist from establishing field offices. Where this is a necessity such offices should be opened on the basis of un-manipulated request by the African NGOs. But even then, the justification for field offices can only be to build African NGO capacities to assume the responsibilities and roles of such field offices. It follows therefore that Northern NGO field offices should have a definite, short life-span and counterpart African personnel destined to assume full responsibilities on the withdrawal of expatriate staff.
- (ix) Northern and international NGOs should desist from tying their assistance to the provision of personnel when they know, or, in the view of their African partners, appropriate personnel are locally available.
- (x) Northern and international NGOs need to firmly grasp the historical fact that the North dominates the South. This is a necessary

starting point for any Northern and international NGO to develop true partnership with African NGOs.

- (x1) Northern NGOs working in the area of poverty alleviation and people's empowerment in Africa need to be actively involved in poverty alleviation and people's empowerment in their own countries. Charity begins at home; and Northern NGOs which will not recognise or fight for people's rights in their own countries cannot be relied upon to champion freedom overseas.
- (x1i) Northern and international NGOs should not do to African NGOs what they would not accept to be done to them.
- (x1ii) Northern and international NGOs should engage in an open and principled dialogue with their partners in the South with the view of developing guidelines for their partnership. Such guidelines should not take advantage of the weak, but rather should be based on the most advanced progressive and equitable NGO thinking.

#### By African Governments

- i) Need to consistently and resolutely stand with the people in their struggle for democracy, national independence, social progress and international solidarity.
- ii) Repeal all dictatorial and repressive laws which limit or deny people the right to organise themselves in the pursuit of their legitimate interests, political, economic, social or cultural.
- iii) Pursue an economic policy and determine national development plans which enhance the people's quest and struggle for democracy, national independence national unity and social progress.
- iv) Expose all machinations employed to dominate the African governments and peoples.
- v) The struggle for national independence demands that the African people build on the strength and draw on the inspiration of earlier patriots. African governments are urged to spearhead the identification, rehabilitation and utilisation of the heroes of the anti-foreign penetration resistance; and to deploy this as a resource in the fight

against neo-colonial domination. Further, our rich African culture needs to be rediscovered, revalorised and employed as a resource for mobilisation, confidence building, and for the people to assert themselves.

- v1) Recognise that any African government which does not heed i) to v) above poses a serious encumbrance to people's participation in their development; and is therefore part of the problem rather than part of the solution Africa is in search of.

### The Governments of the North

Governments of the North know too well that their political and economic objectives in Africa are undemocratic and cannot be peacefully achieved. They can only be achieved through trickery, deception; but more so through brute force. But force is incompatible with popular participation. We can therefore conclude that the principal handicap to popular participation in development by the African people is Northern domination. The principal beneficiary, and therefore the promoter, instigator and underwriter, of all forms of dictatorship and repression in Africa is big business. Big business directly takes its own specific repressive measures, especially at the production line; while Northern governments undertake additional repressive measures for big business as a whole.

African NGOs need to be aware of this fact; and from that knowledge appeal to governments of the North to pursue more democratic economic and political objectives in Africa, and that way enhance the conditions for people's democratic rights and participatory development.

### In Lieu of a Conclusion

We are aware that many people will argue that the question of Africa's recovery and development is an urgent, practical issue, with us here and now, and that we cannot, therefore, afford the luxury of "historical excursions".

Unfortunately, while the problems may be urgent and with us here and now, they did not emerge only last night; they are the result of a long historical process. They cannot in fact be solved here and now. Just as the development of the African crisis has been a historical process which has taken shape and matured over generations and centuries, so its resolution must of necessity also be a historical process. Indeed the understanding of the nature of the crisis

and how it came about is itself a precondition for coming forward with a deep, durable solution.

On the other hand, those who accept the importance of historical analysis may nonetheless consider looking back 500 years as going a bit too far! Yet in historical terms 500 years is not a long time, in any case not for a vast continent like Africa. Moreover, the real issue is not about how far back in history we go, but rather the relevance of going as far as we choose to go.

Others might shout, "but we know all this!" It is our view that the critical issues herein articulated, while we believe are true, yet they are not commonly, consciously or consistently articulated. Every opportunity must therefore be employed to popularise them. Further, even some of those who may claim to know, in practice do not build their arguments and analyses on the basis of what they claim to be common knowledge. It is like a scientist who claims to know all about the laws of gravity, but proceeds to construct an airplane whose design assumes that gravity does not exist. It cannot fly.

It is not enough to know. Knowledge needs to be of practical value. And in social science there is a gaping need: to build our arguments and analyses on the best of earlier studies and advancements - just as the modern scientists developing rockets, skylabs and all, build on Copernicus' discovery that the earth moves around the sun, for example.

Most important, as Africans, we are not ashamed of our history as it actually was. Indeed our interests cannot be served by hiding or obscuring it. We also believe that it is permissible occasionally to be filled with democratic indignation.

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