Challenges and Weaknesses of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Africa: The Case of Indigenous NGOs in Ethiopia

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Civil society in Africa assumes a different character from that in most Western liberal democracies, reflecting underlying social and economic conditions and the particular historical and political circumstances of individual countries (Robinson and Friedman, 2005). Informal and/or traditional civil society institutions have long been existed in most African countries. They are especially rich in the spheres of associational life, bringing citizens together in collective endeavors.

The informal civil society groups have been contributing for the emergence and proliferation of formal registered Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) which may number in the many tens of thousands across the continent. These formal CSOs prevail ethnic and kinship structures, the legacy of colonialism, the pattern of economic development, and authoritarian forms of political rule and they differ markedly from the voluntary associational form characteristic of the United States and Western Europe. In almost all African countries, formal associations representing organized collective interests first took place under colonial rule. Mass-based civil society organizations contributed to struggles for independence through their prominent role in nationalist movements, despite efforts by the colonial authorities to control and regulate their activities. These included organizations comprising peasants and workers, as well as ethnic associations representing tribal and regional interests (Robinson and Friedman, 2005, citing Fatton 1992; Kasfir 1998, Bazaara 2000; Gyimah-Boadi and Oquaye 2000).

CSOs in Africa can be classified in various categories such as their organizational structures (formal, informal), their functional interest (development, policy advocacy, etc), their level of operation (local, regional, international, etc) and their funding sources (membership supported, locally financed and international donors). However, it is difficult to put a clear boundary among the categories as a single CSO can fall under more than two categories. One of the most common categories of CSOs, which can fall under most of the above categories, are Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that are associated with the International Development System. Some people or organizations, including government ministries use the term NGO as substitute for CSO. The African Development Bank described NGOs as visible, formally constituted, urban-based bodies that seek to provide goods and services to certain categories of people, or to advocate certain policies. They include (i) indigenous Non-Governmental Development Organizations (NGDOs); (ii) Organizations for domestic or regional issue-based advocacy NGOs (E.g. in regard to human rights and gender); (iii) Knowledge based NGOs (E.g. research and policy analysis); (iv). International private aid agencies for development or humanitarian action (ADB, 2001). Hence, due to the above mentioned characteristics of NGOs, most of the cases and data for this paper are collected from African NGOs, mainly from Ethiopian NGOs. Though, Ethiopian NGOs have few peculiar characteristics, the writer believes that they have a lot of common features, with other NGOs in Africa. One of the reasons for African NGOs having most common features is that they have common international donors/partner NGOs that have great influence over African NGOs.

It is believed that NGOs have great contribution to poverty reduction initiatives, especially in addressing income poverty of peoples in African countries. And some human rights activists and writers in the field argue that NGOs are playing a great role in democratization processes and enhancing good governance in some of the African countries. However, despite their great role in the society, they have been encountering a number of challenges and have a lot
of weaknesses. The paper will try to discuss the various challenges these NGOs are facing and major weaknesses they have.

Methodology

- **Desktop research:** Desktop literature review on the challenges and weaknesses of African CSOs/NGOs in general and Ethiopia CSOs/NGOs in particular. Various books, research papers, documents, etc. will be referred to understand the gender perspective of this migration;

- **Case studies:** The case of some 40 representative indigenous Ethiopian NGOs will be identified and their case will be considered in order to see the challenges and weaknesses they are facing. Structured interview questions will be prepared for interviewing their representatives and their response will be summarized.

- **Interview and Discussion:** with researchers, heads of NGOs, program/project staff of Northern NGOs; representatives of Government organizations who have good knowledge of NGOs work and their organizational challenges and weaknesses.

References


ECO Team, 2008: “Updated Mapping Study Of Non State Actors In Ethiopia”; William Emilio Cerritelli, Akalewold Bantirgu, Raya Abagodu


