Betty Luma Joins
National Commission For Human Rights & Freedoms

Members of the NCHRF pose with the Prime Minister H.E. Chief Inoni Ephraim

Several Cameroonians were glad to hear of the appointment of Magistrate Betty Luma as a member of the National Commission of Human Rights and Freedoms.

This tireless women's rights advocate and civil society activist was appointed alongside other members by Decision Nº 2006/275 of September 6 2006 by the President of the Republic of Cameroon, H.E. Paul Biya.

Mrs Betty Luma is a trained Magistrate and President of FIDA Cameroon, an international non-governmental organisation. Besides her role as a mother and President of a court of justice, Mrs Betty Luma has positioned herself as a protector and educator of women particularly, on their social, civil and political rights. Uncountable meetings, Seminars and conferences have been organized for several years to bring women out of the world of ignorance of their fundamental rights. Recently, she championed the new wave of political awareness and participation that has gripped almost every woman in the South West Province.

Mrs Betty Luma has a wide experience in handling gender sensitive

Mrs Betty Luma

and human rights issues thanks to seminars and conferences that she has attended in several countries abroad. Her entry into the National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms will certainly bring more seriousness to the development of strategies to manage situations of Human Rights abuses in Cameroon.

The National Commission for Human Rights and Freedoms was created by Presidential Decree in 1990 at a time of popular demands for democracy. Its mandate includes, among other things, the capacity to conduct inquiries and necessary investigations on the violation of human rights and freedoms.

The NCHRF can also conduct human rights education studies as well as coordinate NGO actions in human rights. It is empowered to visit detention sites.

By Mukete Tahle Itoe

The Open Society Institute & The Soros Foundations Network

The Open Society Institute (OSI) is a private operating and grant-making foundation based in New York City that serves as the hub of the Soros Foundations Network, a group of autonomous foundations and organizations in more than 50 countries. OSI and the network implement a range of initiatives that aim to promote open societies by shaping government policy and supporting education, media, public health, and human and women's rights, as well as social, legal, and economic reform.

To diminish and prevent the

George Soros extends support to Africa

negative consequences of globalization, OSI seeks to foster global open society by increasing collaboration with other non-governmental organizations, governments and international institutions.

OSI was founded in 1993 by investor and philanthropist George Soros to support his foundations in Central and Eastern Europe and former Soviet Union. Those foundations were established starting in 1984, to help former communist countries in their transition to democracy. The Soros Foundations network has expanded its geographic reach to include foundations and initiatives in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Mongola, Southeast Asia, Turkey and the United States. OSI also supports selective projects in other parts of the world.

The Open Society Initiative For West Africa (OSIWA)

The Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) is dedicated to supporting the creation of open societies in West Africa, marked by functioning democracy, good governance, the rule of law, basic freedoms, and widespread civic participation. OSIWA believes that it best serves by sustaining catalytic and innovative initiatives that add value to the efforts of West Africa's civil society. OSIWA seeks to collaborate with advocacy groups, like-minded foundation, governments and donors.

OSIWA further recognizes the

Abdul Tejan Cole
Chair of OSIWA's Board of Directors

Mrs. Nana Tanko
Executive Director, OSIWA

importance of incorporating global developments in building open societies and seeks a greater commitment to the region by rich

nations.

OSIWA serves 15 members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), as well as Cameroon, Chad and Mauritania. The ECOWAS members are Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau Liberia, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo.

OSIWA is based in Dakar, Senegal. The foundation also maintains an office in Abuja, Nigeria, which focuses on good governance and human rights programs in Nigeria.

EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

We invite you to join the women in the South West Province to rejoice over the appointment of Women's rights activist, Betty Luma, into the National Commission For Human Rights and Freedoms.

In this edition, we follow **Africa Lobby**'s view that Poverty in Africa has unfortunately dehumanized Africans and stripped them off a lot of dignity.

Using Cameroon as Case Study, the **Partners for Productivity Foundation** takes us down the valleys of Africa's Poverty and identifies Cameroon's debt as an enormous stumbling block in the way of any successful stabilization and adjustment effort which could lay the groundwork for renewed growth.

The **Community Development Resource Association** believes that the Civil Society must develop strategy and reinforce capacity-building to play a major role in contributing to the fight against Africa's poverty. Our Forests remain sources of wealth that must be preserved by institutions like the **Forest Governance Facility**.

As we watch transitions in civil society organizations like **HELP OUT**, we believe that Churches must continue to preach more love and peace to the Cameroonian society.

Thanks for contributing articles to The Bell.
Stay Blessed.

By George Mbella

TRANSFORMING AFRICA
Africa Lobby's Dream!

Africa, in the wake of neo-colonialism and the present trends of globalisation, is still heavily plagued with economic stagnation due to its dependencysyndrome.

Many theories have been propagated earmarked at translating African underdevelopment into a development that is sustainable. Curiously, there is still an African problem. The underdevelopment cry is still heard even when ears are blocked.

Africa's human and natural resource potentials undoubtedly make it the richest continent. Paradoxically, this wealth largely remains a paper and research document since the other side of this reality is the experience. Publications, conferences, seminars, workshops, just to name a few, have identified the African problem, pointed blames, made recommendations, have even gone ahead to apply some resolutions, but one question remains; Are the results attained?

Shall we keep theorising and heaping blame on others without recognising that this is a problem we should each and everyone embark on solving?

Poverty in Africa has unfortunately de-humanised Africans and stripped them off a lot of dignity. The 'end justifies the means' turns out unfortunately to be a concept which unconsciously dwells in many Africans thus pushing them into wanton acts aimed at making them assume those human expectation ideals that are witnessed by western living standards. Unfortunately many end up with swollen pockets yet with poor minds.

Truly, Africa is purposely impoverished by some non-Africans who make use of the greedy dispositions of other Africans for the development of these non-Africans. But, some Africans even without foreign influence have chosen to keep impoverishing Africa due to some very egoistic and selfish tenets they cling to. Spiralling tribalism, adhesion to pocket-hole traditional practices, ingrained and culti-
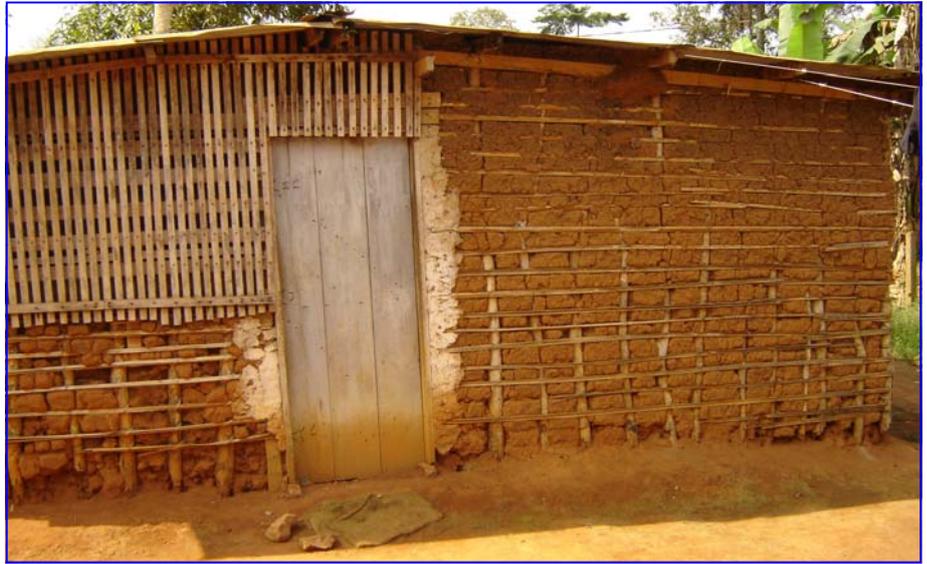
Poverty in Africa has unfortunately de-humanised Africans and stripped them off a lot of dignity

vated unacceptably accepted corrupt practices, recalcitrant sociological tendencies, loss of creativity and innovation, are few examples, which stifle development in Africa by Africans.

Africans want development, yet some of these very Africans are the very ones who preach good governance but practice bad governance, have hung human virtue adages, epigrams and proverbs on their walls but are incarnates of vice. African institutions are so corrupt subject to bureaucratic red tape practices such that investment in Africa remains threatened.

Conflicts are rife as a result of a cleavage in religious and ethnic beliefs and a struggle to control resources. We understand poverty in Africa contributes almost entirely to its backwardness. HIV/AIDS is eating up the African labour force and destroying those who wield the capacity to contribute in developing Africa.

We understand the elements that cause African stagnation. It is time to creatively identify the little area where you can develop Africa and with the convergence of these little developments, a great African development shall be the end product. Let us understand that development and peace operate on the same spheres,

and the fundamental belief that the power of love amongst Africans and not the love of power shall be the ultimate element that will break down all anti-development barriers that exist in us and thence fuse those strengths and talents within us towards the attainment of the African dream. Almost each and every one of us is guilty of holding Africa behind, but once we have recognised this, we must start from where we are and gradually expand our contributions towards making Africa a haven for life's treasures.

In pursuance to the will to bring some impetus to the African development consciousness, **AFRICA LOBBY**, in its own way has as mission to contribute in encouraging any activity that will bring development to Africa. **AFRICA LOBBY** will advocate for educational programmes that underline development, run between those actors that bring development, preach development, propagate and persuade legislature and systems on sustainable development oriented policies. Our mission will be to Develop Development Oriented Strategies.

By Nfinyo Mabu
*Founder/President of*
AFRICA LOBBY

The Social Cost of Recession and Restructuring in Cameroon

Looking at Cameroon at a glance you will find a multiparty presidential regime type of Government, with two official Languages (French and English) and 24 other African languages. Ethnic groupings in Cameroon are as follows: Highlanders 31%; Equatorial Bantu 19%; Kirdi 11%; Fulani 10%; North Western Bantu 8%; East Nigritic 7%; other African 13%; non-African <1%. Equally there are three main religious beliefs: Indigenous beliefs 40%; Christian 40%; Muslim 20%. It should be noted that close to 90% of this population is of rural setting whose main occupation is centered on primary activities (subsistence agriculture, hunting etc.). The government policy during the post independent era, promoted an export-oriented agriculture where it relied for its foreign earning.

The Debt Crisis in Cameroon

In the 1970s, the OPEC countries had sold many barrels of raw petroleum that resulted to their crises, but huge amounts of dollars were available. International banks were looking for customers to borrow money since in economic terms money has to produce money. Cameroon like many other third world countries was offered a lot of money for public investment (building of roads, schools, hospitals etc.) as loans. Unfortunately, these loans had unclear clauses on interest rates, as they fluctuated according to the world economy. The United States Federal Reserve Board further aggravated the situation, as it attempted from 1979 onward to break inflation and to attract foreign investment through a dramatic manipulation of the price of money. The interest rates went up from 8% to 16%, while the prices for raw materials (coffee, cocoa, cotton, rubber etc.) that Cameroon relied on drastically dropped. Cameroon was particularly hard hit during the 1980s by political and economic decline that led to change in the market, which (despite a recent upturn
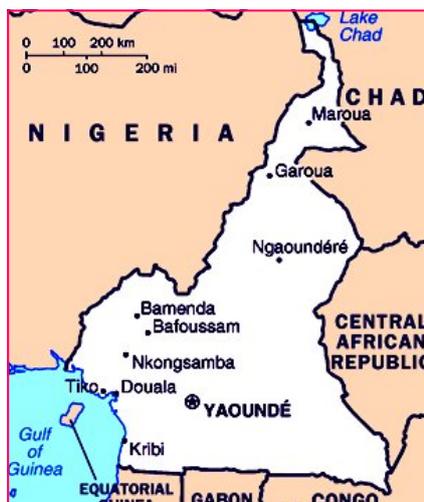
for some products) constituted a continuing threat and several developments initiatives converted this indebtedness into the explosive debt crisis. Close to thirty years after what Cameroon has been able to pay is the interest according to the money leaders, specifically the World Bank and the IMF and leaving the borrowed capital unpaid.

Ensuring a particularly deep and long lasting debt crisis was the imprudence of both banks and borrowers, who during the latter 1970s had often agreed upon loans that were not only economically risky, but also frankly speculative in nature. A considerable part of the money borrowed by the government, enterprises and individuals at that time were embezzled and found its way into private foreign bank accounts, leaving Cameroon with a debt which corresponded to no ongoing local income-generating activity, leaving the burden mostly to poor Cameroonians. It should be noted, that the government and private businesses also took out loans for projects, to increase industrial capacity or improve infrastructure, which seemed justified given the originally low level of interest rates and the abundance of capital in the international market during the latter 1970s. The debt crisis was also worsened by the termination of all private lending to heavily indebted countries in late 1982.

This not only ensured that any solution to the crisis would be long and painful, but also that Cameroon

would be forced to depend heavily on multilateral financial organizations that controlled the only possible source of new funds.

The situation was further complicated by the foreclosure of the option of bankruptcy or default for private and public borrowers alike. While during earlier crises government incapable of paying foreign debts declared itself insolvent and renounced its obligations, the situation in the 1980s was very different as the government increased its own debt burden by assuming responsibility for private sector debt. As time went on, the negotiating strength of Cameroon was weakened by the formation of lenders' cartels. Donor governments (working through what came to be called the Paris Club) supported debt rescheduling only if agreement on macro-economic reform had been reached between the country and the International Monetary Fund. Meanwhile private banks (forming what became known as the London Club of creditors) refused to negotiate separately with Cameroon like any indebted country, while international financial institutions refused to provide assistance because they had not reached on an agreement with the relevant group of private lenders. This situation remained in force until 1989, when the very slow progress of debt rescheduling convinced the United States government that it was time to weaken the bargaining position of the banks through holding out the possibility of multilateral assistance to countries which might not yet have satisfied the demands of private creditors.

Lessons learnt from Economic Reform over the course of the 1980s, implementation of neo-liberal economic reform in the developing world repeatedly forced both international advisers and national economic policy makers to attempt (often with little success) to impose a relatively standard set of policy recommendations on

The Social Cost of Recession and Restructuring in Cameroon

stubbornly complex and idiosyncratic society. In the realm of economic performance alone, results were extremely mixed. By the early 1990s, Cameroon was still mired in recession. International technical assistance and advice undoubtedly played a role in overcoming the immediate crisis and re-establishing order in the national economy. The threat of conditionality was utilized to give national policy makers greater room for manoeuvre. In a number of instances, Cameroon was at least convinced of the benefits to be obtained from radical neo-liberal reform, as she was a counterpart in the international financial community.

By the mid-1980s, the repeated failures of most free-market adjustment programmes promoted experimentation with new approaches that retained the goals of imposing fiscal discipline, liberalizing internal markets and promoting export-oriented growth while adapting the means employed to attain these ends. The extreme view that stabilization and adjustment could best be attained by entirely liberalizing all markets, and allowing all prices to be set by the unfettered play of "free-market forces", gave way to recognition that such orthodox programmes seemed less effective than more heterodox strategies relying on fixing and defending certain key prices in the economy.

The majority of the debt-related adjustment experiences now considered to have been relatively "successful" - have restored economic order through reliance on "heterodox" programmes. They have defended the exchange rate from sharp fluctuation (often allowing it to suffer very small daily changes), imposed price controls on a few strategic goods and services, fixed interest rates within certain limits, and brought workers and employees into agreements guaranteeing relative stability of wages and mark-ups or profit margins. At the same time, trade and financial regimes have remained relatively open to international mar-

kets. It requires effective mechanisms for agreement among representatives of the government, business sector and working class - as well as channels that, in turn, link representatives of these sectors to their clientele. Beyond this, a success story seems to require fulfilling other, more specifically economic, conditions.

The first of these is obtaining access to large reserves of foreign exchange, or to a continuous flow of fresh outside resources. Defending exchange rates, interest rates and other elements of the economy that ensures predictability and attract foreign capital to take foreign exchange.

Foreign aid or lines of international credit can also play a central role in permitting relatively "successful" stabilization and adjustment efforts. This is certainly being seen in the case, where the international community has been pouring resources into the adjustment experiment, the United States, France have been providing large amounts of new foreign aid.

Such external support does not, of course, guarantee recovery. A number of countries are large oil or copper exporters, or have obtained foreign aid without being able to stabilize their economies. Prudent economic management, as well as an efficient institutional structure, is essential. But it is still important to note that Cameroon has not had access to the level of external resources, which would be required to support a thoroughgoing economic reform with some chance of success.

Although it is fashionable to say that the debt crisis is over, this is true on a global level only to the extent that sufficient time has elapsed since 1982 for the international banks to build protection against default and ensure the stability of the system. Cameroon debt continues to constitute an enormous stumbling block in the way of any "successful" stabilization and adjustment effort, which could lay the groundwork for renewed growth. Some

private and public debt has been rescheduled, often repeatedly and an increasing proportion of the bilateral debt cancelled; but multilateral financial institutions are still resisting any suggestion that they institute programmes of debt relief, beyond the HIPC Initiative. In the meantime, continuous pressure to settle back accounts produces constant new borrowing.

A significant reduction in international interest rates over the past few years has temporarily decreased the cost of servicing this debt. And declining interest rates in the industrialized world have also provided an important incentive for investors to turn toward "successfully adjusting" Cameroon's economy which boast of relatively stable economic and political conditions and offer significantly higher levels of interest than those which can be obtained in Europe, Japan or the United States. During the past few years, an unprecedented volume of foreign private investment has flowed into these "emerging markets", sustaining some kind of renewed growth that have been stagnant for decades. But this is, however, a fragile arrangement.

Interest rates in the industrialized world are beginning to rise again, thus tempting capital to return to Northern markets and simultaneously increasing the volume of expenditure required servicing Cameroon's debt. Furthermore massive flows of foreign capital toward "emerging markets" in recent years have created onerous obligations. Investors in stocks and bonds expect high returns and are prepared to withdraw on very short notice.

Therefore for the economic policy to successfully adjust is fundamentally constrained by the potential for instability inherent in the current model of recovery, based so precariously on foreign private capital markets.

By
Nzene Sylvester
Enongene
Executive Director,
PFPF

NGOs, Civil Society and Capacity Building
Towards the Development of Strategy

By Allan Kaplan
Community Development Resource Association

THE QUESTION

One of the major constraining factors to NGO effectiveness is the lack of adequate strategy to give effect to organisational vision. The lack of a commonly held - and motivating - organisational vision is itself often problematic, demanding leadership attention or consultancy intervention. An organisation without a vision, without direction, rapidly becomes incapacitated, prey to contrary winds and internally mutinous. Yet vision alone, once articulated, is often insufficient to ensure competent **practice**. Vision is couched in broad terms, as a general direction, unifying purpose or common thread. Vital for organisational coherence and identity, but not sufficient to prioritize action and evaluate its impact. A specific strategy - or strategies - is required to give effect to vision, to operationalise a general direction. Any number of activities - reflective of available resources and current context - may, to a greater or lesser extent, move an organisation some way towards realizing its vision. How does the NGO choose, how does it prioritize, how does it marshall and co-ordinate its scarce resources? How does it evaluate the impact of different activities, different strategies? How does it relate different activities to each other, and to the overall vision?

One of the most common debilitating factors in NGO functioning is the inability to develop and manage strategy, to recognise the essential differences between different options, to choose between options and to relate different strategic strands to each other in such a way as to maintain organisational coherence and optimal utilization of scarce resources.

1.1 Collective Vision And Specific Strategy

This paper is an attempt to provide some initial assistance towards the task of delineating strategy for NGOs. It is written in the context of South Africa 1994, a transitional society with a dynamic and energetic NGO community. In this context, the changes in NGO visioning are clear. In the past, NGOs were required to engage in resistance to a given status quo; to react to powerful forces; to destroy the power of those forces; to break down an existing reality. The time has now come to build, and we are ill-equipped. At issue is the translation of the new vision into viable strategy.

Into the vision-vacuum which was created by the sociopolitical u-turn crept two phrases, now ubiquitous in South African development discourse. The first is "civil society"; development work is seen to be directed towards the building of a vibrant and vital civil society. The second is "capacity-building"; the way to achieve a vibrant and vital civil society is to build the capacity of the organs and instruments of civil society - we look towards the proliferation of effective peoples' organisations. (These perspectives are not limited to South Africa; they form an integral part of international development discourse). Thus our collective vision is clear: development work is building the capacity of the organs of civil society. The specific identities of many NGOs is framed and informed by this collective vision.

Yet, having this vision is a far cry from the discrete strategies required to give effect to the vision. For one thing, we lack a common perspective on what we mean by "civil society" and "capacity-building". For another, what we understand is often so vague and general as to allow us to engage in many undifferentiated activities at the same time. At the very least, in order to develop and manage our specific strategies we need to analyze the vision in a manner which facilitates our choosing of particular strategic options. Strategy is a question of directed choice; of the optimal and judicious use of scarce resources to give effect to an organisational vision. What can we understand by civil society, and what are our options for building towards it?

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

The image of a strongly developed civil society is one in which the power of the State and of Capital is held in balance by a plethora of competent, independent and democratic community-based organisations; one in which, according to Narsoo, "there are a thousand buds of power blooming, where there is a rich texture and depth of organisation, and where debate, creativity, innovations and self-expression abound..."(1) As Narsoo notes, the concept of civil society is a contested terrain, insofar as the exact extent and limit of State intervention versus the integrity of civil society activity remains an open question. In some countries - notably those of Eastern Europe - civil society is defined relatively broadly and thus may include the State. The definition in South Africa most often refers to the non-governmental sector. Civil society has been referred to as all those voluntarily constituted social relations, organisations and institutions that stand outside of state structures. The term "organs of civil society" is often used with reference to these groups. Shirley Walters notes that, "Both the state and civil society are integrally part of the processes of governance. It is within civil society that consent for or

contestation over the policy and practices of the state are cultivated".

Whatever our particular definition of civil society may be, whatever our particular preference, two points remain salient. The first is that much of the debate regarding civil society centres around the relationship it should have with the state. The second is that, civil society is "a crucial element" in a democratic society". Beyond this all we have to go on is a general notion of civil society as a mushrooming of "peoples' organisations." Very little else. In all the debate, then, while our overall vision may be clear, there is very little to inform NGOs with respect to their development of specific strategy. Our development vision may refer to capacity-building with the intention of strengthening civil society, but do our current perspectives provide us with enough analysis to strategise? With whom should we work, and how? Where to place resources, how to differentiate and manage strategies, how to evaluate impact? We all more or less know what we want, and many are achieving a great deal, but the absence of differentiated strategy is palpable in many NGOs, and the lack of focus drains energies and resources. As NGOs, we need some tools of analysis to maintain the cutting edge of social transformation.

2.1 AN ANGLE ON CIVIL SOCIETY

I do not have a definition of civil society which is better than, or even substantially different from, anyone else's. I do not intend to take a position in the debate concerning the state and civil society. But civil society is a complex and multi-dimensional concept, and it seems to take on different configurations depending on the angle from which it is viewed. What I am going to do is simply look at it from a fresh perspective, one which will hopefully provide a number of configurations to serve as analytical tools with which to develop strategy. Later, a perspective on "capacity-building" should provide another tool. Thereafter we will attempt to use these to revisit the question of NGO strategic development.

Civil society, in its broadest sense, seems to imply a society in which the interests, concerns, and dignity of the civilian, the citizen, the "ordinary person", are taken seriously. That is to say, a society which takes as its point of departure the rights (and responsibilities) of the individual "person in the street", rather than ideologies (of whatever kind) or the self-interest of particular groupings. The first question that confronts us then, is: what are the **social institutions** which are necessary for a well-functioning civil society. The second is, how should these institutions be **constituted** to ensure that they serve the interests of the individual citizen, rather than the interests of institutional hierarchies, particular ideologies or the self-interest of particular groupings.

2.2 AN INSTITUTIONAL ANALYSIS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Fowler notes that, "Institutions are stable patterns of behaviour that are recognized and valued by society". Uphoff maintains that institutions "...are complexes of norms and behaviours that persist over time by serving collectively valued purposes. Institutions can be concrete, like a nation's central bank or quite diffuse and general such as the institution of money". For our purposes we use the term social institution here in the sense of "quite diffuse and general" mentioned above.

The first institution that comes to mind is, strangely, the institution of government. The state may or may not form a part of civil society, depending on our particular characterisation, but it is certainly necessary to a well-functioning civil society. Some form of authoritative regulation of social affairs is, perhaps unfortunately, necessary if we are to talk of civil society as opposed to anarchy. Quite how this institution should be constituted, how much weight it should have, how interventionist it should be, is not our immediate concern. Let us simply say for now that **sound government** is a primary social institution, and leave the issue of what is meant by "sound" to be addressed slightly further on in the text.

Law, the judicial system, is another social institution of paramount importance. A civil society is impossible to conceive of without a "soundly-constituted" institution of law.

Education is another such institution. Without the institution of education, civil society remains a fantasy.

The institution of education becomes interesting when we recognise that it can be sub-divided into sections like "pre-primary education", "primary", "secondary", "technical", "tertiary" and "continuing/adult". Each of these can then be seen as institutions in their own right. What are the consequences for a society which recognizes the importance of the institution of education but which does not provide resources towards the development of pre-primary education as an institution; that is, which does not recognise the role of pre-primary education in the development of a society which is attempting to be "civil" (as in South Africa)? Is the institution of primary educa-   tion more important to a developing country with inadequate resources than the institution of secondary education? Is the institution of tertiary education more important than that of technical education, or vice versa, or neither?

Other institutions which come immediately to mind are those of **health, shelter, culture, agriculture, money, capital, work, labour, religion, information, environment**, and even **community** and **family**. Obviously, there are many more; equally apparent, all of these can be sub-divided to some extent. Some overlap with others, some can be delineated in different ways. The point here is not to provide a definitive and exhaustive list, but simply to use these examples to indicate the usefulness of an institutional analysis of civil society.

In a developing society with limited resources - such as South Africa - where should we be putting our energies? Which institutions need strengthening, adjustment, reform, revolution? Which are of primary importance, which secondary? Which depend on others for their own adequate functioning? Which have been particularly debilitated through oppression and partisan political activity; which have been particularly neglected? Upon which does an emerging civil society primarily depend? Different persons and organisations will respond differently to these questions. It is not the particular response which is relevant to our purposes here, but rather the questions themselves. This kind of institutional analysis forms our first level of strategic decision making. If our NGO works "cross-sectorally" - perhaps in training, organisation development, funding, general community development - then there are choices to be made in response to our analysis. If our NGO already works within an institutional sector, we need to be able to analyze this sector adequately, to establish its relationships and dependencies on other institutions, in order to begin to work strategically.

To provide one personal example: my own NGO provides organisation development consultancy services to "organisations working for social transformation", in the interests of strengthening civil society. Given the South Africa of the past, we have never worked with state institutions, only with other NGOs. Now South Africa is changing; what should our relationship with the future state be? I have little doubt that it will need organisational assistance, but what should our response be to the requests which are already beginning to emerge? Should we leave

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the state to others, and concentrate on non-governmental social institutions on the assumption that a powerful civil society will be the best guarantee of competent and acceptable state performance? Or should we work with the state on the assumption that the development of other vital social institutions will be compromised by incompetent or unacceptable state practice? In other words, what is our particular analysis of our particular society at a given point in time, which will inform our strategic decision-making with respect to our limited resources?

To mention another example: should an educational NGO, having developed proven methodologies for teacher improvement, move from concentrating on secondary school teachers to putting its scarce resources into pre-primary teacher training because a large donor has "made it an offer it cannot refuse"? What is its **own** analysis of the relative importance of the two social institutions? Without our own ability to analyze and strategise, we as NGOs are at the mercy of a generalised vision and overwhelming external forces.

2.3 TOWARDS CIVIL INSTITUTIONS

So an institutional "diagnosis" of society provides us with our first level of strategic analysis. But there is a further, more crucial level of analysis which we need to engage in. Institutions in themselves are vital components of society; where they are lacking, or under-resourced, problems arise. However, institutions of themselves do not necessarily ensure the emergence of a **civil** society. We need to go back to the question, raised in the previous section, of what characterizes a "sound" institution, in terms of contributing to civil society. In other words, how should these institutions be **constituted** to ensure that they serve the interests of the individual citizen, rather than the interests of institutional hierarchies, particular ideologies or the self-interest of particular groupings.

I would contend that the way to characterize civil society is as a society **in which more people have access to resources and power over choices**. Bearing in mind that a civil society, in its broadest sense, is a society in which the interests, concerns, rights and dignity of the civilian, the citizen, the "ordinary person", are taken seriously. If

this is an appropriate perspective, then it makes sense to judge the "soundness" of a civil institution in terms of whether "more people have access to resources and power over choices".

Let's look at this characterisation in slightly more depth. First, it contains the adjective "more" as a recognition that perfection is a fantasy; a civil society is one which is "in process", rather than one in which struggle has ceased. Second, it demands not only that a social institution have adequate resources assigned to it, but further that ordinary individual citizens have **access** to those resources. Third, it argues that individual citizens are able to **influence** - not simply theoretically but in reality - those aspects of the particular institution which impinge on their lives. Consequently, if this characterisation were to hold for the institutions of society, we would have a society which genuinely took as its point of departure the rights and concerns of its citizens, rather than those of "institutional hierarchies, particular ideologies or the self interest of particular groupings". A civil society.

We can thus begin to analyse social institutions not simply in relation to each other, but in the way they are internally constituted. To take the institution of law as an example. The making of laws belongs to the institution of government; the first question to be asked, then, concerns this latter institution - to what extent is the individual able to influence it? But once the law is made, questions refer to the institution of law. Do all people have equal access to it, or does access depend on financial resources?

Are practitioners impartial, or do they respond more favourably to suits-and-ties than to rags-and-bones? Do the institutional hierarchies use language which the ordinary citizen can understand, or do they maintain their power - and consequently reduce the user's ability to choose, or influence - by using jargon only understandable by the institutional elite? Do rural people have the same access as urban? Can female practitioners advance at the same rate as males; do they **really** enjoy the same rights? Is access to the law equally available to squatters and home-owners; is access easier for people of a particular skin colour, or religious or ideological persuasion?

Similar or comparable questions can be asked of each and every social institution. Think only of the institution with which you are most involved, or take institutions which most impinge on your life, like **health**, or **shelter**, or **education**, or **work**. These kinds of questions provide us with our second layer of analysis into social institutions in terms of whether they contribute to civil society or not. Now we are concerned not simply with the amount to which institutions are resourced, or with their relations one to another, but with how they are internally constituted. It is this layer of analysis with which we must engage if we are to be able to strategise intelligently. We are NGOs trying to strengthen civil society; how, and with what, do we need to engage?

3. STRATEGIES TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY

3.1 PROVISION

One area of possibility is to **provide**. The particular institution - with which we as an individual NGO are involved - being under-resourced, or lacking in effective delivery, or the people having only limited or partial access to it, we feel called upon to supplement. There are many ways in which we can do this: by providing access to marginalized users, by providing resources, by providing services. All of these are legitimate activities and strategies, yet they raise questions. Can we, as a small NGO, really make a difference to the institution itself, thus contributing to civil society, or are we simply alleviating the pain of the **actual** configuration of society for a small number of recipients only? Is it possible that this serves to **maintain** the status quo by relieving institutional hierarchies of responsibility, or by reducing the urgency of peoples' demands for redress, for a change in the institutional configuration? Does it increase complacency and the expectation of outside assistance, thereby reducing peoples' power and their capacity to influence, to demand and exercise some control? Yet in situations of deprivation, do we have the right to deny people the resources and services which we are able to provide and which people have the right to expect of a civil institution?

Our point of entry will depend on our analysis of the

institution and of our own capacity to respond. Perhaps the provision of resources or services alone is the appropriate response. Perhaps we want to do other. Who are the other NGOs operating within the same institution? Could we link up, collaborate, pool resources in a way which might provide a more consolidated and exhaustive service?

3.2 ADVOCACY AND INFLUENCE

Perhaps we could begin to lobby the institutional hierarchies, try to work on the level of policy so that the access of ordinary people to the institution is increased, so that people gain more control, more influence, over the form and utilization of its resources. If this is what we intend, can we do it as a relatively small and marginal NGO, or should we look at ways of increasing our "weight", perhaps by joining with others, forming a national or regional body, and so on. Whatever we choose has implications for strategy. We - as the NGO - would need to incorporate the capacity for research, for writing, for analysis and policy formation, for collaboration and influencing. Will we have to reduce our capacity for service in order to accomplish this? Either way, we will need to be careful that our strategies actually contribute to a more civil institution, rather than merely drain our energies as we engage with the institution **on behalf of** the people. **Are more people actually gaining access to resources and power over choices?**

3.3 ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY-BUILDING

The options for us as NGOs mentioned above fall into two strategic strands: provision of resources and services and influence over policy. While both can serve to render an institution more "sound", we should remember that a **civil** institution takes as its point of departure the rights of the ordinary citizen, the right of access and the right of choice. Civil society is a society whose institutions **belong to the people. Ordinary people need to gain mastery over these institutions, need to wrest control from the hands of elites, particular groupings or hierarchies, need to integrate the institutions into their daily lives, need to ensure that they are served by these institutions, rather than only serve them**. Therefore it is not simply the institutions which need to change; people themselves need to gain the capacity to "own" them, to ensure that the values they perpetuate are those commensurate with a civil society, with the rights of all individuals to access and control.

This process cannot be facilitated by NGOs purely through provision or influence. **The capacities of the citizens themselves need to be developed**. This is not to say that people have no capacities, but rather that institutions gain a life of their own which often distances them from their users. Capacity, or mastery, can be gained through provision of information, through training, but only partially. Institutions are powerful entities, and people will ultimately gain access to, and control over, them through **organisation**. People need to gain the capacity for organisation, need to become organized, in order to ensure integration of the institution into their lives. This is where the concept of civil society as "a plethora of competent, independent and democratic community-based organisations" comes in, where "...there are a thousand buds of power blooming, where there is a rich texture and depth of organisation...". Community-based organisations need to arise, to grow and expand their capacity to make a particular institution their own, to ensure that they have the organized power to demand access and exert influence.

This then forms another possibility for NGO strategy; what has come to be known as "capacity-building", the facilitation and support of viable community-based organisations. Seen in this light, it is no longer a vague and general social vision, but a strategic response to a particular analysis of a specific institution in a particular society at a specific point in time, as well as an understanding of our NGO's positioning within that institutional sector.

For too long we have seen civil society simply as a vague, undifferentiated concept conceived as an opposition, counterforce or balance to the state. A proliferation of peoples' organisations and peoples' power to hold the state in check (even where the state is conceived as part of civil society). And it is this, but it is also more. Civil society is the control of the individual citizen over the institutions of society; their access to those institutions, their influence over them, and the extent to which they reflect the chosen values of a society. In all of this, of course the institution of government plays a key and primary role; it pervades all other institutions, can distort or manipulate them, or play a part in their reform. Civil society will not flourish where the power of the state is too excessive, intrusive, or partisan; the institution of government is therefore a major site of struggle. But it is not by any means the only one; many institutions are in need of transformation, and such transformation will go a long way towards containing the power of the state. Where the various

institutions are owned and influenced by ordinary people, a civil society can be said to be emerging.

4.THE INSTITUTION OF ORGANISATION ITSELF

An institutional analysis, then, provides NGOs with a handle on the development of strategy. NGOs, even where they are seen as relevant players in development, are often seen as marginal or "bit" players, able to do innovative or experimental work, able to supplement the provision of scarce resources by the state or by institutional agencies, able to respond flexibly to communities "on the ground". These are important and vital characteristics, not to be sacrificed, but we tend to trap ourselves into being typecast as ultimately not very effectual - in terms of the transformation of society - when we do not analyze and strategise adequately. **Where and how should we engage in order to impact on a particular institution, and to what extent need we engage with other institutions in order to assist with the transformation of the one with which we are concerned**. (In this regard, it is clear that all institutions are affected by the institution of government, but they are also affected by other institutions; there is a continuous interweaving across permeable boundaries).

We have already noted that the degree of transformation of an institution can be gauged by the extent to which ordinary people have access to it and are able to influence it. We have also noted that this, in turn, depends on the capacity of people to organise, on the degree of organisation attained by people on the ground, with respect to a particular institution. Put another way, the proliferation of community-based organisations impacting on a specific institution will contribute towards ownership of that institution by communities, and its integration into the lives of ordinary people. The extent to which community-based organisations exist, to that extent will the power of an institution devolve to the people, and thus will the manner in which an institution is constituted be transformed. Therefore, as has already been noted, one strategy with which NGOs can engage is the facilitation of community-based organisations; building peoples' capacity to understand a particular institution and to organise within it. But this raises another point.

If organisation is such a vital component of civil society, if the ability of people to organise themselves is seen as

By Allan Kaplan
Community Development Resource Association

Forest Governance Facility
Introducing a Multi-Stakeholder Approach in Cameroon's Forest and Environment Sector

The Government of Cameroon adopted the Cameroon Forest and Environment Sectoral Programme (FESP) in 2004. The FESP is a comprehensive and coherent policy for accountable and sustainable management of Cameroon's forest resources and is without equivalent in the West & Central Africa. Donor funding for the FESP is via a basket Fund called the Cameroon **Forest Sector Governance Support Programme** (FSGSP) contributed to by the World Bank, AfDB, ACDI, SCAC, AFD, BMZ/GTZ, JICA, FAO, WWF and IUCN that serves the institutional strengthening of Ministry of Forestry and Wildlife (MinFoF) and Ministry of Environment & Nature Protection (MinENP).

The FESP is currently structured to reinforce the Government of Cameroon. It foresees consultations to include non-state actors in a constructive manner in policy development and implementation and implementation, but there are no specific mechanisms for non-state actor involvement. The RIGC programme is set up and managed by MinFoF using HIPC funds foresees funding community based activities in the forest sector, including community forestry, but also does not explicitly seek to involve civil society in policy development and implementation.

Why a multi-stakeholder approach?

Forest and environment sector reform is a **complex,** multi-actor issues that should include those with an interest or stake in the sector ad well as elites and marginalized communities: the situation demands a multi-stakeholder approach! To consolidate the achievements Cameroon has made to date requires a **deeper degree of consensus, coalition and ownership.** So, successful reform needs a comprehensive engagement with stakeholders who will win OR lose from changes. Multi-stakeholder processes and engagement will help move the government, its partners and funders into new relationships.

FGF Purpose

The 'Forest Governance Facility' (FGF) aims to support the FSGSP by building up the public domain related to the Cameroon FESP, to facilitate the engagement and participation by non-state actors with policy development and implementation.

The goal is enhanced environment for good governance and equitable, sustainable management practices in the Cameroon forest and environment sector with a specific objective to develop an autonomous and neutral Facility that will serve as a mechanism to build up and serve We FESP public
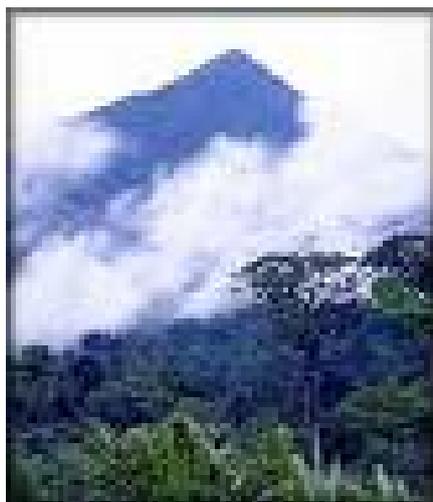
domain. To reach this, four outputs have been defined:

Outputs

1.Development and utilisation of a public arena to serve all relevant actors of Cameroon society including civil society, private sector, elected officials at different levels, educational/research institutions and the Government to facilitate free and fair discussion of policy development and implementation in the Cameroon forest and environment sector. Development includes the supply of appropriate, demand-driven capacity building services and information to support activities by actors concerning forest and environmental resources. The quality, responsiveness and capability of policy-making should be improved. The Facility will also provide an avenue to link with regional Congo Basin forest dynamics.

2. An Improved "enabling environment" by awarding competitive small grants fund, for stakeholders providing **new** research, information, clarification to stimulate debate and discussion and/or **provide** opportunities to see, hear and learn.

3. Pubic availability, improved **access** to information in the environmental & forest decision making process and transparency, for activities of the FGF and for existing information relevant to the process and transparency, for activities of the FGF and for existing information relevant to the FGF's purpose.

Forest Governance Facility

Impacts

Impacts in the long term on poverty alleviation are expected, specifically wealth creation, equitable distribution and job creation, as well as on access to basic services and increased environmental sustainability. Short term impacts expected concern governance of forest and environment sector revenues, governing institutions and participation of stakeholders in decision making.

Coverage

The FGF is a national facility covering all of Cameroons diverse natural environments: from the tropical rainforests, to montane forests to the savannah.

Beneficiaries

The multiple beneficiaries of the FGF are targeted at four groups of stakeholders that are not addressed directly by the FESP, namely:

Civil Society Organisation (CSOs, NGOs. Associations, Cooperatives, trade unions)

Elected groups (parliamentarians, mayors) and (non-elected) traditional authorities

The private sector (international and domestic loggers, NTFP exploiters, small entrepreneurs)

Media, research and information intermediaries.

Methods

The methods used by the FGF will include public participation in decision making, consultations, focus group discussions, meetings and workshops, capacity building, training, information dissemination, questionnaires, study visits, and research.

FGF Activities

- *Creation of « public arena « for Cameroon forest and environment issues*
- *Research & consultation services*
- *Award of small grants to stakeholder beneficiaries*
- *Information production and dissemination to stakeholders, the government and public*
- *Capacity building of stakeholders in the four target groups*
- *Strategy for institutional sustainability*
- *Regional linkages*
- *Monitoring & evaluation of outputs and results*
- *Information Systems*
- *Communication, publishing & reporting on forest & environmental issues*

Approach

The FGF started in June 2006, based on a phased "Build-Operate-Transfer" approach that migrates the FGF towards a long-term financial and institutional sustainability. The first eighteen months are the **BUILD** Phase supported jointly by UK DFID and SNV, where the public arena will be set up, grants awarded, information made accessible and the feasibility of the Facility investigated. The next 18 to 24 months are an **OPERATE** phase, where activities continue, given the support of the Government of Cameroon, DfID, multiple donors as well as CSOs and the private sector. The next period is to **TRANSFER** the FGF from a DfID funded programme to multi-stakeholder funded institution, where the FGF may be established as a legal entity or embedded in an existing institution with appropriate resources (financing, legal status, human resources, material etc) for self-sufficiency.

Staffing

The FGF is staffed by a small Secretariat, based in Yaounde. A multi stakeholder Advisory Board provides strategic direction and includes MinFoF, MinEP, MinPlapDat, UK Department for International Development, (DFID), SNV - the Netherlands Development Organisation andfour representatives from the stakeholder groups.

Transitions At HELP OUT Buea

After six months of diligent work at HELP OUT Centre for Human Rights Education, Saskia Lenaerts a volunteer at the Centre has left to return to her homeland, USA. Ms. Lenaerts, who is holder of a Bachelors Degree in Political Science and African Studies from the University of Wisconsin, USA, took up volunteer work in December 2005 and she assisted in several projects conception and implementation and starting off a Peer Alliance Programme at the Buea Central Prison.

Additionally, Emade Ndille Euphrasia, another female volunteer, has moved on to pursue a Masters degree course in the United States. Ms. Euphrasia was attached to the Women Working for Women (WWfW) Desk at HELP OUT.

New Volunteers

HELP OUT is pleased to welcome new volunteers. Joining HELP OUT is Elizabeth Brown, a British from Central London. Ms. Elizabeth comes in just in time to fill the vacuum created as a result of Saskia's departure. Elizabeth is a History and Politics graduate from the University of Nottingham and is an AIESEC member.

Also joining the HELP OUT team is Valeryne Ntube, a graduate from the University of Buea, who has come in to continue from where Euphrasia left. With a background in Women and Gender Studies, and Sociology and Anthropology as second major, Ms. Valeryne is involved primarily with the Women Working for Women Desk.

HELP OUT expresses sincere thanks to Saskia and Euprasia for the diligent services rendered, and wishes them the best of luck in their future endeavours. We also welcome Elizabeth and Valeryne to our team!

By Obasi Marinus, HELP OUT

Miss Elisabeth Brown
New Volunteer
HELP OUT BUEA

Churches Should Preach More Love to the Cameroonian People

Cameroon is passing through a lot of difficulties in the political, social and economic domains. Thousands of university graduates are unemployed and roam our streets. There is a rampant increase in the number of families which can no more meet up with daily balanced meals. The increased rate of broken homes is leading to juvenile delinquency and increase in the rate of teenage pregnancy. Bribery and Corruption, child labour and child trafficking are also increasing. Likewise rape cases, drug abuse, prostitution and the increase of deaths of thousands of Cameroonians from HIV/AIDS.

The disease is associated with stigma, repression and discrimination as individuals affected {or believed to be affected} by HIV have been rejected by their families and their loved ones and communities. This rejection holds as true to the rich countries of the north as it does in the poorer countries of the south. In many societies people living with the disease are often seen as shameful. In most cases the burden of taking care of these patients are left in the hands of girls and women, who are forced either to drop their education or their lucrative jobs by family members to take care of their husbands or children.

We live in a society were women have been greatly discriminated against. This discrimination against women often begins in childhood. Many girls are subjected to female genital mutilation, a practice that denies them their human rights. Girls are often not given the schooling opportunities afforded their male peers. Without adequate education many women are unable to find jobs and assert their economic independence, a denial of their right to equal access to employment and a decent standard of living. Many are forced into marriages, where they are frequently prohibited from exercising their reproductive rights, and also deny those equal rights in marriage. If these marriages end, discriminatory inheritance and property laws often ensure that the women will remain economical disadvantaged.

Our churches must contribute to the growth of the society. They must not be passive bystanders in the face of the many factors responsible for the continuous deterioration of our country, Cameroon. The task of lifting our country from decrepitude belongs to no other but us. In line with what the bible says in 1 Cor. 13: 1 - 2, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I have become a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though i have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing", there is that great need for churches to participate actively in development. Love is all what will bring about good governance in our country.

Even though we all do believe that the Government needs clear and detailed plans for combating corruption, the churches also have a role to play in the fight against all the ills in the society. Corruption is an issue of governance and the quality of government polices. Persons holding public offices must therefore be accountable to the people. So in order for the churches to add to more development the following proposals are worth looking into:

- Educate and sensitize the females on the advantages of education and training.
- Give financial assistance to interested children to have proper education and training by means of scholarships.
- Abstinence and the dangers of teenage sex should be encouraged.
- Bible reading and prayers in families should be encouraged, to bring about solid family backgrounds.
- Discourage family heads from separating children through child trafficking.
- Encouraging members to be good custodians or stewards of government coffers. warning them of accountability that all will give at the end of times.
- Educating members on living healthy lives, free from diseases and malnutrition.

By Grace Bojuh Jato
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GNGG, Limbe