

**The Challenges and opportunities facing NGOs in Africa:  
Some reflections on the work of the Pastoral and  
Environmental Network in the Horn of Africa (PENHA)**

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# 1. Historical perspectives

## Raison d'être (Why NGOs)

- Economic and social crises and their social ramifications
- Livelihood crisis emanating from epidemics, civil wars, drought, natural disasters and famine
- Governance crisis (authoritarianism leading to lack of civil rights) vacuum filling.

## Evolution

- Pre-independence period benevolence tied to evangelize, civilize and commercialize
- Efforts to "tame and modernize "traditional grassroots organisations to "modernized" structures
- Post -second world war misery and destruction led to the emergence of home grown ngos and quangos in the north e.g. Oxfam G.B(Oxford family for famine relief 1950)
- 1970-1985:** a period which saw a rapid expansion of Northern NGOs as a response to manmade and natural disasters in the South for e.g. the great Sahelian droughts of the early seventies. Decade of great turbulences, cold war, repressive but weak regimes all over, radical liberation movements, trade unions.
- Northern NGOs developing considerable expertise in crisis management, got richer in terms of funds, emerging as the good guys in the eyes of their governments.

- **1985-1995:** a period of great transformation which saw the end of the cold war, emergence of democratic regimes, increase in the numbers northern NGOs,
- Emergence of strong southern NGOs/CBOs some of them based upon northern NGO structures
- Emergence of failed states, last phase of decolonisation, tension developing between NGOs and southern governments (on sovereignty issues leading to new legislation to have more control over NGOs).
- Northern NGOs still received vast amounts of money from northern governments. NGOs adopting more corporate style of management.
- **1995 to date.** This is a period is characterised by a diminishing financial base(donor fatigue)
- More competition from robust southern NGOs, more legislative control from southern governments
- During the globalisation period, NGOs now have to operate under a new policy agenda driven by liberal democratic values.
- This is an imposed agenda by many governments and the agenda includes **good governance, democracy, gender equality, environmental protection, and more recently anti-terrorism**
- Weak legislation governing Northern NGOs operating in the South. Basically "do as you please in most cases". As the African proverb goes "someone's death being someone else's feast"

## 2. Perceived roles and critique of northern NGOs.

- Some critics believe that NGOs are a continuation of the colonial legacy. (civilize, Christianize and commercialise)
- NGOs are believed to be cost effective
- NGOs are willing to operate in difficult areas
- Supposed to be value driven with altruistic ethos
- Participatory in their approach
- National government can't do everything and NGOs have a development gap to fill
- Claim to represent the poor and the marginalized
- Less bound by borders and international protocol e.g. working in rebel held areas, unrecognised states.
- Extension of the colonial legacy (neo-colonialist)
- Self perpetuating, unelected, unaccountable and have no constituency as such
- Politically naïve and do not deal with real causes of poverty
- Not as cost effective as they claim
- Long term sustainability of NGOs is in question
- The role of Geo. -Politics impacting on NGO funding and operations e.g. government legislation in UK and USA.

Weak management and organisational capacity  
Inter-NGO competition and lack of collaboration  
Too much dependence on official funding  
Risk prone and unprepared to innovate  
Replacement to legitimate Government bodies  
Replace or undermine grass roots movements or CBOs.

### **A number of critical questions we ask ourselves in the light of 30 year experience**

How true is the assertion that NGOs are able to reach the poor and which category of the poor or in other words how are the poor defined?  
Can they really foster long-term local participation when they are under constant donor pressure to perform and deliver?  
As external agents how far could they push the participation and empowerment agenda without being too subversive?  
How viable are NGOs and will they survive without external funding?

### 3. Challenges /threat to northern NGOs

- NGOs are overstretched and under-resourced
- Increasing opposition from some governments in the South (**aid versus trade debate**)
- Increasing stakeholder pressure through conditionality, regulations, legislation etc.
- Increasing politicisation of development aid- e.g. good governance, civil society, gender aids etc.
- Uncertain future of official aid and preference for soft loans etc.
- Long-term funding commitment not feasible (3-5yrs).
- Short-term aid e.g. food aid -humanitarian more likely to be available.
- New players emerging in the South CBOs, Unions, Grassroots organisations
- Post September 11 situation money is diminishing and more strings attached. Bush's doctrine **“with us OR against us”**
- Some funds are tied to religious affiliations or promoting certain values/ideologies.

## 4. NGO responses

- Serving "home" government's agendas for example democratisation of the Middle East etc. and become useful channel for development aid
- Diversify funding base, mergers and alliances
- Improve internal management systems and adopt a more business like approach
- More investment in knowledge and mutual learning than simply running operational projects
- Clearer strategy, mission and more sector- niche based approach corporate approach.
- Proactive management and changing with the times
- Performance based and linked to continued funding

## 5. Who funds NGO's (Northern NGOs)

- Own governments in some cases up-to 40%. Conduits for donor country and thus part of the aid is kept in the country
- Public money e.g. Comic Relief, Community Fund/Lottery Fund etc. as in the case of UK
- Donations from Trusts, Companies, Foundations, deeds etc.
- Income generation activities-charity shops
- Project overheads up-to 10%
- Becoming intermediaries or clearing houses for Southern NGOs who can't access northern funds directly due to exclusion.

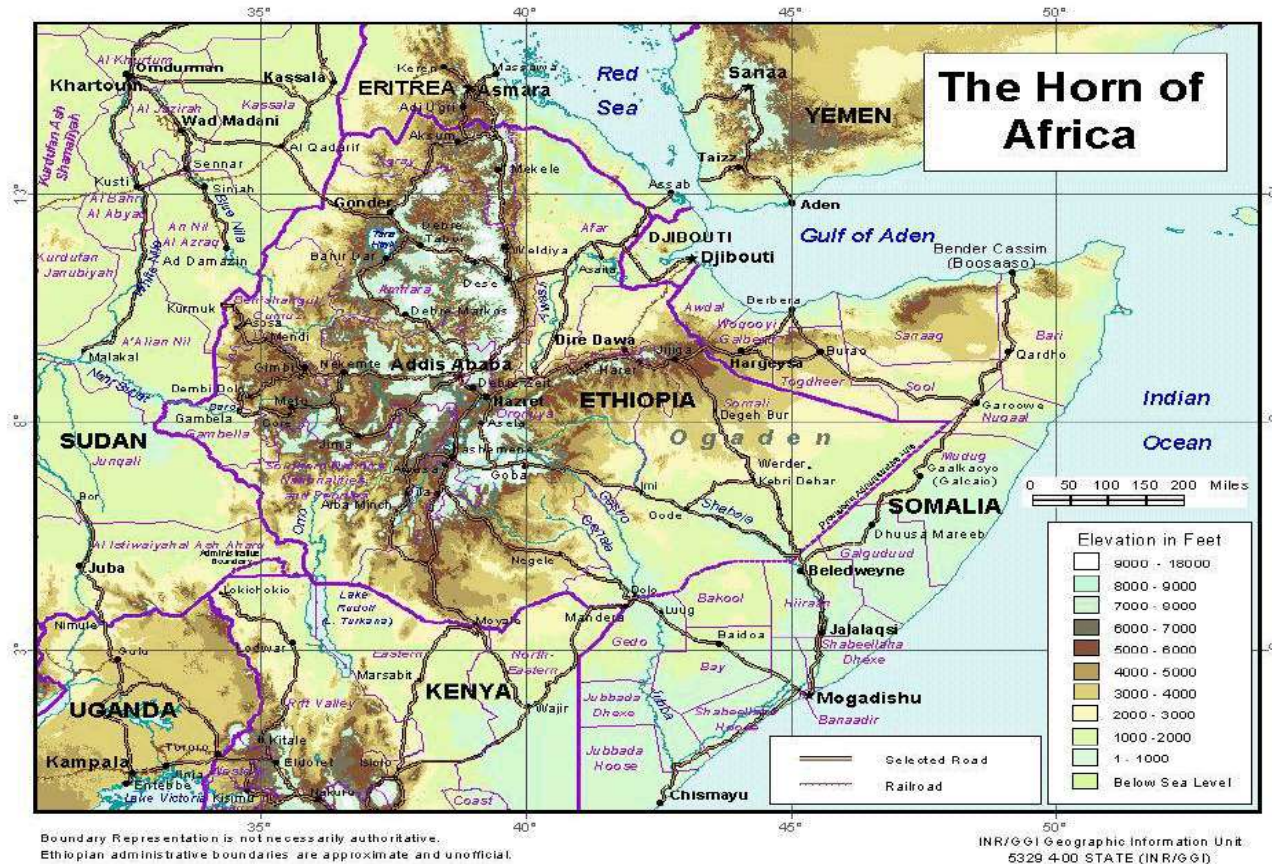


## 6. Survival strategies for the future

- In the next few years we are likely to witness the following dynamics among the NGO community:
- Critical redefinition of NGO niches, roles and responsibilities as well as more scrutiny from Northern and Southern Governments on programme delivery
- Some northern NGOs are likely to run out of money, close shop altogether and die naturally
- Given the high level of urbanisation and the extent of high levels of poverty in urban areas many more urban focused NGOs may emerge as a result
- A good number of Northern based NGOs may be forced to scale down their presence in the North to cut down costs and move their infrastructure to the South as part of their fund raising/cost saving strategy.
- In this way they may compete with Southern NGOs in the South to the detriment of the Southern NGOs.
- We will see more inter-agency mergers and consortia approach among NGOs to widen their funding base as well areas of operation
- Some Northern based NGOs may choose to become a funding clearing house for Southern NGOs who may not be able to directly access funds in the North due to political and geographical reasons.
- Lewis & Wallace conclude by suggesting certain new roles for NGOs. These are:
- Capacity building of Southern partners and thus playing a catalytic role and relinquishing work on the ground to local partners
- Change in their home constituencies and involve themselves more in development education and encouraging more north-south alliance and dialogue at grassroots level.
- Create more ethical alliances for fair trade and deal with fundamental causes of poverty
- Re-structure themselves and have more legitimacy and accountability

## 7. Challenges for southern NGOs.

- Southern Governments feel threatened by strong local NGOs and CBOs that attempt to address the "real" needs of their constituents as opposed to perceived needs
- Room for civil society in some countries may be very limited
- Harsh legislation against NGOs and CBOs at country level
- Relief type NGOs (Northern NGOs) are more favoured than the local development oriented ones.
- Basically Northern NGOs bring more food and foreign currency to the country concerned.
- Northern funders and Northern NGOs do not trust them with their money
- Major barriers to access funds in the North directly have to be done through intermediaries (exclusion).
- Northern governments enter into bilaterals with Southern governments, thus excluding civil society



# Map of the Horn within Africa and the middle East context

## General

- Population in 6 countries 200 million plus
- 5million square KMs in Area
- Ecological diversity affecting livelihood systems
- Region shares diversities of cultures, religions and different civilisations
- Important strategic significance Red-Sea, Gulf and Indian water ways (Soviet-USA during cold war now China, Middle East and super powers) both military and trade

## General

- Somali piracy drawing negative global attention locally perceived as “Coast guards” in a failed Somali state.
- War on terror targeted region (Africom USA)
- Somali coast becoming dumping ground for toxic waste from the West
- Conflict proneness, drought and famine (very high military expenditure by National Governments)
- New phenomenon of “Boat people” both economically and politically driven
- Brain drain within Africa, the Middle East and the West
- Growing unplanned urbanisation and high levels of poverty among the urban poor including pastoral peoples

## Some key challenges

- **Disaster proneness:** Wars, droughts, famines tend to affect pastoral areas more than sedentary areas.
  - There seems to be more insecurity in pastoral areas (due to insurgencies of one kind or another),
  - Wetlands (riverine areas) in pastoral areas are under the greatest pressure, from expanding agriculture
  - Famines tend to have their worst effects in pastoral areas.
  - Land grabbing by local elites, the State, international companies and powerful countries now a major growing phenomenon.

## Some key challenges

### **Neglect in terms of development interventions:**

Most development interventions in the pastoral areas are either imposed from the top by government and/or inappropriate, and are not tailored to the needs and aspirations of pastoral people.

**Land tenure issues:** In most of the countries of the Horn of Africa, legislation regarding land-use does not accommodate or guarantee pastoral land rights and access. In some cases this has led to violent conflict between the state and pastoralists.

**The expansion of Prosopis** invading high potential grazing areas and not utilized properly.

## Opportunities

- **Some new thinking and positive developments over the last two decades. These include:**
  - Greater recognition by the state of the positive economic contribution pastoralists make to the national economies.
  - A greater knowledge base based on sound research on the pastoral way of life, and the overcoming of old stereotypes.
  - The World Bank, UN agencies and international NGOs recognize pastoralism as an important form of land use, that makes an important contribution to the national economy, and are willing to support it.



## Opportunities

- There are a number of local NGOs/CBOS, created and managed by pastoral groups, representing their interests.
- More Regional-International NGOs, research institutions doing more serious work on pastoralism and creating global alliances.
- More and more pastoralist associations and unions are emerging as pressure groups in each country region-wide.
- Some governments, e.g. in Uganda and Kenya, have allowed the formation of parliamentary pastoralist groups (PPGs) bringing together MPs representing pastoralist constituencies. For example The Federal constitution in Ethiopia (1996) recognizes pastoral land rights and the need to protect such rights.
- The idea of better services through mobile clinics, mobile schools, and mobile para-vets is now being introduced in some of the countries.

## Our Mission

PENHA's mission is:

- To reduce poverty among the pastoralists in the Horn of Africa through the empowerment of communities
- To foster sustainable and dignified livestock-based and non livestock-based livelihoods.

## Our Objectives

Fostering sustainable livelihoods requires a coordinated approach at the grassroots and policy levels. PENHA therefore commits itself to two goals:

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## **PENHA's Main Themes**

- ▶ Economic empowerment of women as well as broader questions of gender equality
- ▶ Pastoral Environmental and Resource Management (including the use of indigenous knowledge)
- ▶ Nomadic services (education and health)
- ▶ Conflict analysis and prevention through low key peace making
- ▶ Livestock and livestock product market development
- ▶ Capacity building and advocacy for grass root partners

## **Some reflections on PENHA's experiences**

- Some governments in the South view Southern NGOs/CBOs as an extension of Northern NGOs and at times as a threat to national security specially if they deal with “rights issues” i.e. land rights, governance issues, women rights, sovereignty, conflict resolution issues etc.
- So the mutual suspicion of Northern-Southern issues continues. E.g. the 2009 NGO legislation on national NGOs/CBOs in Ethiopia; the expulsion of 14 international NGOs from Sudan last May following the indictment of the president by the ICC in the Hague, Eritrea's Proclamation on NGOs 1996 are all examples of the difficult environment where we operate .
- Many Line Ministries within the state apparatus feel genuinely threatened by Northern and Southern NGOs. They feel NGOs prey on their staff and set up parallel institutions which undermine their legitimate authority. Many NGOs both Northern and Southern sideline Line Ministries to their detriment. PENHA has some positive experiences of working closely with Line Ministries in the Horn.
- Lack of legislation or too stronger application of legislation as well as heavy handed use of procedures makes NGO work very difficult. Such Commissions or NGO Board which are also part of the national government machinery also could be bureaucratic and lack internal competences thus making NGO work in a given country very difficult.
- Politicization of the NGO sector. Some governments like to support “loyal” Associations, Unions, CBOs and NGOs with political affiliation to the ruling party which also provides them with moral and financial support.
- Southern NGOs like their governments too much on foreign aid and have not devised a proper exit strategy to become self sufficient.

## Points for debate

- There is clear evidence that the grassroots organisations and social-movements in the south themselves are organised and they do not need Northern NGOs to advocate on their behalf.
- NGOs could be involved in matters of equity and justice. There is a need to turn market forces to the advantage of the poor by reclaiming benefits normally siphoned by intermediaries.
- NGOs can be a major force in promoting ethical consumption
- NGOs could also make more use of social capital and networking in the south
- Formal NGOs tend to advocate more globally which obviously is a less risky business but they should be more involved in pro-poor microeconomics social policy advocacy in the south.
- Because of the overall decline of foreign aid (where NGOs played a key role in its distribution) new forms of international cooperation are suited to the global economy in the context of economic integration through subsidies and resource transfers. NGOs may intervene in this process enabling the poor to negotiate better.