

‘What Role do NGOs Play in Alleviating Chronic Poverty?’

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Northern NGDO¹s, Inclusion and Extreme Poverty

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Abstract

This paper argues that Northern non-governmental development organisations (NGDOs) are immensely varied in terms of policy, value system and approaches to poverty. Consequently, it is problematic to generalise concerning whether Northern NGDOs either include or exclude the destitute in engaging with Southern counterparts. The reality is somewhat confusing. The evidence suggests that each Northern NGDO has some ways in which they are inclusive, and some ways in which they are not, giving credence to the position that the NGDO sector is not homogenous. NGDOs, extreme poverty and inclusion are defined within the paper. A brief exploration is made of approaches to extreme poverty, inclusion and the influences on NGDO policy. Evidence is then taken from the field to explore some NGDOs’ engagement in including those often excluded by so-called NGDO development programmes. The gaps between policy and practice of NGDOs is then discussed. A suggestion is made whereby NGDOs might be more inclusive in their policy and their reach to the most poor. This is that rights approaches to development are increasingly being researched and transposed into policy. An explanation of rights approaches and their potential implications for inclusion of the extremely poor then follows. Some examples, experiences and research into the adoption of this approach by Northern NGDOs are then offered.

Introduction

The reality for NGDOs today is that they are increasingly challenged, by the media, public, governments and academia. Many critics of NGDOs go so far as to see them as non-legitimate parts of Civil Society. It is certainly the case that, ‘At the beginning of the 21st Century there are forces acting both for and against greater NGO involvement’ in poverty eradication (Edwards, M. 2000, pp16). NGDO roles and relevance are also threatened by decreasing aid revenues. Since 1991 the real value of aid from the north has dropped by some 21%. (DI 1999, pp1). Furthermore, definitions of aid have altered, meaning that what is included in the term ‘aid’ has become more inclusive, obscuring the drop in revenue (Fowler 2002, pp13). NGDOs are fighting for decreasing funds whilst increasing their focus on high-profile policies and programming that will ensure future funding. Some critics are arguing that such high-profile policies tend not to attack the

¹ NGDO = Non-governmental development organisation. These are organisations not linked to a government, specialising in development. ‘NGOs is an umbrella phrase for grassroots, intermediary and international groups. .. We use the term development to refer to positive changes in the material, social, political and physical status of a country’s peoples’ (Van Rooy 1998 pp33).

root causes of poverty (Harriss-White, 2002, pp12). Such critics also argue that, instead, NGOs are concentrating on the more glossy and populist 'causes' such as street children or homelessness, which ensure them recognition with their home public and funders (explained by Edwards, 2000 pps25-26). This paper aims to reveal and explore some assumptions inherent in these assertions about Northern NGOs. In so doing evidence will be offered concerning the hypothesis that NGOs are neither inclusive in approaches to extreme poverty, nor do the majority of NGO policies attack extreme poverty comprehensively.

What is Extreme Poverty?

There is nothing new in discussing extreme poverty. It is analysed in the chapter 'Wealth, Poverty and Virtue' of Plato's 'The Republic'. It is central to Thomas Paine's argument in 'Agrarian Justice' of 1797. In the twentieth century it was explored at length by people as different as Susan George, Paul Bauer and Robert Chambers. These later discussions were the basis of the debate on well-being and ill-being in the 1990s, best exemplified by Dasgupta (1993). Chronic poverty, extreme poverty or destitution is a separate state from poverty because it is more profound, long-term and all encompassing. Extreme poverty is universal, in that it occurs in all societies, although the extent to which it exists in each nation often goes un-assessed. There are many interpretations of this extreme state of poverty (Kanbur and Squire 1999, World Bank 2000 chap 1, Hulme et al 2001 pp4).

The definition to be used in this paper derives from a combination of two explanations of extreme poverty, both of which take the capability approach². Sen views poverty as a matter of capability deprivation. This approach rejects monetary income as the measure of well-being on the basis of its being reductive. Instead it focuses on indicators of the freedom to live a valued life. 'Poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities, rather than merely as lowness of income, which is the standard criterion of identification of poverty' (Sen 2000 pp87). These capabilities involve disadvantage through handicap, gender, age, race or caste/class. They also involve location, for example extreme poverty is more prevalent in parts of India and sub-Saharan Africa. Coupling of disadvantages, such as an elderly disabled person in a predominantly poor area, increases the likelihood of extreme poverty. Sen argues that the five identifiable freedoms that are the prerequisites of development are political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security (Sen 1999).

The other explanation comes from Harriss-White who defines destitution as having economic, social and political aspects. Using Sen's terminology she argues that complete lack of capability in all three of these aspects predetermines destitution (Harriss-White 2002 pp2). What is particularly useful about the capability approach is that it recognises the link between the means to poverty eradication and its end. 'The capabilities approach

² This paper does not discuss the intricacies of measuring poverty, extreme poverty and non-poverty. For this debate see Lipton, M. 'The Poor and the Poorest. Some interim findings.' Washington DC: The World Bank.

makes strong and explicit links between human agency, poverty and public policy (necessary to ensure entitlements), and as such is useful for understanding the processes surrounding chronic impoverishment and escape from poverty' (Hulme et al 2001 pp7). Extreme poverty and inclusion in development processes is approached by different NGOs in a variety of ways, as this paper will attempt to reveal.

What is Inclusion?

The very nature of extreme poverty means that an individual is excluded from the development process. Some specific groups of society that are frequently excluded are children, those with HIV/AIDs, the mentally and physically disabled, gay people, minority races and faiths, women, the elderly, and those of disadvantaged caste or class. The excluded chronically poor all have one or more of these disadvantages, usually over generations and always for a considerable time. The types of discrimination faced by people can be divided into institutional, environmental and attitudinal discrimination, as defined by Yeo in her discussion on exclusion on the basis of disability (2002 pp4). These types of discrimination tend to be mutually reinforcing. In other words, the disabled person is less likely to have access to social support and more likely to be discriminated against in society. However, this debate on why people are excluded from the development process is a multi-dimensional and problematic question, not for analysis here (see de Haan 1999). What is important for this paper is that, 'Social inclusion may therefore be a useful starting point from which to understand the politics surrounding chronic poverty, perhaps especially where chronic poverty is based on the discrimination of a particular social group, or 'underclass'.' (Hulme et al pp25).

There are many sector specific Northern NGOs attempting to grapple with inclusion of specific marginalised groups. Amongst them are Action on Disability in Development, Minority Rights Group, Save the Children and Helpage International. There are also many generalist NGOs who focus on inclusion issues in the fight against extreme poverty. They do this on the macro-policy level and also in terms of specific micro-level programmes. It is to both these types of NGOs to which we now turn to explore internal policies on inclusion as regards extreme poverty.

Politics, Policies and NGOs

Whatever the organisational structure of the NGO the politics involved in policy decisions are complex. Politics in this context refers to the power relations and influences on internal NGO policy decisions. There are many complexities to the politics of policy making:

State Influences on NGO Policies - One of the most important political influences on NGO policies is state-INGO relationships in developing nations. A decade ago NGOs were encouraging governments to worry less about meeting structural adjustment debt repayments and more about their extreme poverty and attending to social support systems (Messkoub 1996 pp1). At that time NGO activity was often *against* the government of the country concerned. Now there is a different context in which donors and

governments together are requesting NGOs to take on roles traditionally performed by the state, such as education and health (Krut 1997 pp3). 'Harnessing the operational capacity of Civil Society is now big business. International CSOs are being brought into service delivery work...' (Krut 1997 pp4). No longer are NGOs seen as opposed to the state, in fact they have become part of a pseudo state. 'In Mozambique, for example, some international NGOs have supplanted the local state apparatus in the provision of social services' (Krut 1997 p5). So it is no surprise that INGOs become less vociferous in their criticism of the state's role in development when they are dependent on government funding for such 'social partnerships' (Kjaergaard 2001 pp25).

Bretton Woods Institutions' Influences on NGO Policies - Bretton Woods Institutions' also have a combined influence on NGDO policies. The Millenium Development Goals promoted by Northern politicians and supported by the United Nations and the IMF/World Bank are central to most Northern aid-related work today, including that of NGOs. On the one hand, NGOs pay heed to the Bretton Woods Institutions' agendas, because doing so ensures funding and recognition. On the other hand, many NGOs feel that decades of lobbying have helped shape development within those very institutions, and therefore the agenda they advocate. At the moment many NGOs are devoting considerable attention to the implications of the World Bank and IMF's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) approach to combating poverty. 'Even in criticising aspects of this approach, Northern NGOs are nonetheless accepting the PRSPs as a framework for debate. Through the initiation of PRSPs, Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPAs), and other policy frameworks, Bretton Woods institutions shape the discourse on poverty, not only in terms of issues, but also timing.' (Davis 2002 pp3-5) For example, both Christian Aid and Save the Children UK set about formulating, or informing new policy, on poverty in anticipation of the release of a new World Bank World Development Report in 2000 (Davis 2002 pp3). In this way, inclusion of key initiatives, such as the Comprehensive Development Framework and, latterly Poverty and Social Impact Analysis (Bretton Woods 2002 pp1) ensures NGOs funding. It should not be forgotten that the very fact that NGOs concentrate time and resources on the Bretton Woods Institutions' initiatives gives those concepts and policies legitimacy. It is not unreasonable to suggest, that in the haste to conform to funders' policies analytical criticism of the roots of Bretton Woods Institutions' initiatives is often lacking.

Universalism and Including the Extremely Poor - 'All serious NGOs want to increase their impact and effectiveness' (Edwards and Hulme 2002 pp53). In discussing 'scaling-up' their activities, in other words increasing their effectiveness in eradicating poverty, NGDOs are not talking about increased revenues for themselves, but getting more impact on poverty from less (Myers 1992 pp379 or Chambers 1992 pp45). Also, in discussing 'scaling-up' NGDOs frequently see their work as part of the bigger picture of development. This bigger picture involves other development actors such as government, civil society organisations, the military and the judiciary. It is argued that only through their commitment to eradicating poverty, will universal impact be achieved.

At this time the 'universalist' approach of DfID and the EC is increasingly in evidence, often used in discussions about the Comprehensive Development Framework and the Millennium Goals of 2015. The argument is based on the premise that:

'Most UK development NGOs accept that significant improvements in the lives of poor people around the globe are unlikely to be achieved solely by funding 'projects' at grassroots level'.
(Edwards 2002 pp86).

Integral to this premise are the following points. Firstly it is not enough to prioritise small-scale success for NGOs and Southern counterparts. This is because each village or community exists within a wider society that influences its form. Secondly, that development must be sufficiently large-scale to actually reach the poorest and marginalised. Thirdly, that if the societal infrastructure within a country is not there to reinforce grassroots initiatives, the ramifications of the NGOs work will be confined to the community level. In practice this means that DFID prioritises support for infrastructural initiatives and large-scale civil society work.

Therefore, in wishing to 'scale-up' their effectiveness NGOs seem to have two options for policy making. To work with development actors which are committed to universalist principles of development. Through this means the aim is to include the destitute by attacking inequalities at the national level. Or, on the other hand, opting for a more context specific, community level operation, whereby the poorest are included through a complex local analysis. In practice it appears NGOs are doing a combination of both.

NGDO Policies on Inclusion and Extreme Poverty

Waking up to Inclusion: Reaching the Poorest

One reason NGOs are vital within civil society is that, hopefully, they will reach the poorest of the poor (Van Rooy 1998 pp15). It has been argued that NGOs can represent the poorest, marginalised sections of the community, or can reach them more reliably than governments,

There are grassroots organisations solving the most serious problems of society, often without notice, below the radar screen, largely based on faith. Our job is to find more of these organisations.
Bradley, quoted in Van Rooy (1998 pp39)

Therefore, NGOs in an ideal world, level the playing field of inequity, by giving the poorest a voice they would otherwise be denied. The State, Bretton Woods Institutions and the marketplace have consistently failed in their role as providers of development. So, in the new civil society context, NGOs should provide an alternative voice, although they themselves are far from new players. Many NGOs are beginning 'to wake up to inclusion, but action needs to follow' (Betts and Flower 2001 pp2). One way

in which they can do it is by working at the policy and programming level to ensure inclusion of the destitute. How far this is the reality is uncertain. The following section offers concrete examples of different NGOs and how they are tackling the challenge of reaching the poorest of the poor.

Including the Disabled

Most development actors have historically focused on medical or charity models of disability. So the emphasis has been on providing medical aids, rather than attacking the inequalities faced by the disabled extremely poor. Disability NGOs such as Sightsavers (working with the visually impaired), or Sound Savers (working with deaf people), or Handicap International (provide artificial limbs), are typical of such organisations. However, there is an advent of a new approach that is imbuing most disability NGOs, best exemplified by Action on Disability in Development (ADD). Established in 1985 ADD was set up to strengthen disabled people's organisations 'to fight for inclusion in all aspects of society' (Yeo 2002 pp21). The crucial difference in ADD is that it is 'working exclusively with disabled people using a rights-based approach' (Yeo 2002 pp21). Other disability NGOs are also engaging in the rights dialogue, including Sightsavers and Handicap International cited above.

Most mainstream development NGOs have not had an approach explicitly including the disabled in policy and programming up until recently. Oxfam International now has such a policy, as does Save the Children Alliance, both of whom have worked with ADD on several occasions. World Vision is another such development NGO attempting to unravel the complexities of inclusion, disability and extreme poverty. They have specifically been working on including those who are extremely poor, partly due to their disability. For example, in Burma a number of Community Based Rehabilitation projects were initiated in the 1990s. These were originally designed to focus on specific medical needs of the disabled, such as artificial limb provision. From these initiatives has come a conscious evolution to wider involvement by the disabled in all World Vision's community development projects. This is exemplified by the disabled being represented in committees as much as in education, health and income-generating work (Chapuis and Flower 2000). The impact of World Vision's work is explained in the collaborative text on disability rights issues entitled, 'All things being equal: perspectives on disability and development' (Betts and Flower 2001).

So the importance of advocacy and lobbying of disability rights, and the inclusion of the disabled in policies and programming from the highest to the lowest level is slowly being accepted. At the moment there is still no UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities. Such a Convention will eventually be forthcoming, due to the pressure that is mounting. Once such a convention has been ratified the importance of NGOs' role in seeing the rhetoric is made reality cannot be underestimated. In the meantime it is of the utmost importance that NGOs mainstream disability in planning procedures to increase both conscientisation and inclusion of the disabled chronically poor.

Including Racial and Ethnic Minorities

Some NGOs are lobbying and advocating concerning the inclusion of racial and ethnic minorities at all stages of the development processes. Single issue NGOs have put much work into raising consciousness on minority issues within the wider development context. An example of the success of such campaigns is the work on the Framework Convention on National Minorities (FCNM). Discrimination against the Roma has continued across Europe with xenophobia increasing, rather than decreasing. Some States place Roma children in schools for those with severe learning difficulties. Roma children come from poor children as a rule and some do not speak the language of the country they are in, excluding them exacerbates their problems of chronic poverty. The FCNM was designed to create a legally binding Convention to protect national minorities and to promote tolerance throughout society. The FCNM has been important for protecting minorities in Europe, but also set a precedent for other such initiatives.

A current example of such lobbying in Britain is the Minority Rights Campaign for a Special Rapporteur on minority rights at the UN. They are collaborating with minority rights organisations the world over to lobby for a Special Rapporteur. This Rapporteur would research and lobby on civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights of racial and ethnic minorities.

As for NGOs themselves, much work is being done at the policy level to explicitly incorporate minority rights. Oxfam International's 'Aim 5 – the right to an identity (gender and diversity)' is a clear case in point. By having clear strategic change objectives members of the Oxfam family are facilitating the inclusion of minorities at all levels of activity. At the macro-level the Oxfam's recognise the right to diversity as including indigenous rights at all stages of the development process. At the micro-level the Oxfam's get involved with minority rights struggles in specific contexts. Therefore, a micro-example would be Novib's support for the emergent Pastoralist Indigenous NGOs (PINGOs) Forum of Tanzania during its fledgling years of the 1990s. This organisation was founded to facilitate the advocacy of Tanzanian pastoralists that have suffered economically, socially and culturally from the land settlement and registration policies of the 1990s. On the other hand, at a much wider level, Novib have found that general healthcare provision in the Amazon area is not succeeding due to exclusion of indigenous peoples and their knowledge at policy and programming level. The Novib counterparts engaged in healthcare in the area have started 'Salud Indigena Amazonica' (Siama). This local NGO combines the expertise and experiences of the population of the Amazon and the border areas of Colombia, Brazil and Venezuela. It has the objective of increasing co-operation, developing broadly supported policies, improving the provision of knowledge about health between north and south and engaging the indigenous peoples – along with their knowledge. It is part of the wider Co-operacion y Alianza en el Norte y Oeste Amazonico an umbrella organisation that combines different indigenous and non-governmental organisations in their search for protecting the rights of indigenous peoples within the wider context of sustainable development.

In these ways very different NGOs are both promoting the inclusion of the excluded minorities of the world in the development process, whilst raising awareness of the

importance of such inclusion. Concomitantly, NGDOs and indigenous NGOs are discovering an increasingly common ground in the struggle for civil and political rights alongside economic, social and cultural rights.

Including Older People - Helpage International has a powerful legacy in lobbying for inclusion of older people in programming and policies of NGDOs. The World NGO Forum on Ageing preceded the Second UN World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid during April 2002. This highlighted the extent of exclusion of the older generation in the development process. In preparation for the Assembly Helpage International conducted a survey of older people from 32 nations. The purpose was to elicit their interpretations of age and marginalisation. The results were collated in a publication, distributed just after the Assembly. It has raised awareness with other development actors of the profundity of the exclusion of older people from development initiatives. It also set practical guidelines for including the older individual within community based development. Such internationally oriented initiatives are vital to the role NGOs play in including the otherwise excluded elderly.

In the field, Helpage has done much work in Pension Rights of the older person. This is a recurring challenge, and is increasingly recognised as a major point of exclusion in development as the individual ages. An example of Helpage's policy is that of the Socio-Legal Centre in La Paz (Heslop 2002). Many older people in developing nations, such as Bolivia, lack proof of their date and place of birth. In Bolivia birth certificates were only introduced in the 1950s. The Centre facilitates older people to prove they are eligible for pensions and other social support, such as healthcare. A success of the Centre's work is that only after negotiation with the Centre itself did the Government agree that older people could produce witnesses, rather than paperwork, to prove their age. The Centre also works with those that speak Indian languages and not Spanish, which is another barrier to accessing pensions in Bolivia.

Such work is 'grassroots', but has several purposes. It includes those older people who have previously been voiceless in the development process, and it provides evidence that grassroots level NGDO work can influence government policy. Furthermore, such policy initiatives highlight the importance of including the older person in all development programming of all NGDOs, not just age-focused NGDOs.

Including Women and the Role of Micro-finance in Reaching the Poorest - Mainstreaming of gender in many NGDOs has included women in the development process on an unprecedented scale. Women are still the poorest of the poor, with, to use Sen's terminology more 'capability deprivation' than men. Such NGDOs as the Oxfams, Norwegian Church Aid, CARE and MS Denmark have all mainstreamed gender at the policy and operational level. What 'mainstreaming' means is that gender is not an 'add on' to development, but integral to it. A plethora of guidelines are available on how best to mainstream gender and how to assess the impact of such undertakings (see Skjonsberg 2001). Also, many capacity building organisations, such as INTRAC, are facilitating the mainstreaming of gender in both Northern and Southern NGDOs.

Some NGOs and other development actors, thought they had identified the ‘missing piece’ of the development puzzle for the destitute, especially women, in the 1980s and 1990s. Lack of credit for the poorest and the excluded, especially women, was seen as the barrier to a sustainable livelihood. There have been various interpretations by NGOs of micro-credit. One interpretation is that MFIs are the solution to extreme poverty. Taking the case of Asia where MFI has – and is – used a great deal, this is essentially how the Working Women’s Forum of Madras, the Self Employed Womens’ Association (SEWA) of India and the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh started. Although all of these organisations have evolved, they still have MFI central to their operations. Furthermore, most focus on women. In the North organisations such as Opportunity International argue MFI is the solution to including the extremely poor in their own development (OI 2002 pp3), ‘85% of all loans go to women’. They argue that only by preferring women through MFI can those in extreme poverty be reached.

However, ‘Imp-Act’, the research centre based at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Brighton, together with people such as David Hulme at the Institute for Development and Policy Management at Manchester argue there is more to MFI than just credit. Imp-Act is an Action Research Programme aimed at exploring the short and long-term effect of MFI. In the research so far NGOs have been consulted in the north and south and how MFI can target the poorest is being explored (Simanowitz 2002). Matin et al argue that ‘microfinance is not a magic sky-hook that reaches down to pluck the poor out of poverty. It can, however, be a strategically vital platform that the poor can use to raise their own prospects for an escape from poverty’ (2000 p2). This paper goes on to argue that debates about reaching the poorest have moved on from seeing microfinance as a panacea. Today the extremely poor are recognised as those from ‘vulnerable households with complex livelihoods and varied needs’ (2000 p3). Indeed there are a great many Northern NGOs involved with MFIs either through direct or indirect means. In the case of MS Denmark the Karatu Micro-Credit Initiative in Tanzania has been financially supported by MS Tanzania for some years. This MFI is only for women and is aimed at the poorest sector. Any small business is accepted, so long as there is a business plan and no collateral is required. The women’s businesses include fabric and clothes shops, bars and market stalls. Women involved in interviews³ argued that prior to the microcredit they had to rely either on their husbands or fathers for support. Most of the women were semi-literate and the only accounting skills they had learned were through the Karatu Micro-Credit Initiative training, undertaken by MS Tanzania.

However, critics argue that MFI does not actually reach the poorest at all. For example, in order to gain credit people have to have a social set to which they belong, either a family or a place to live or a group support. The indigent, that is the homeless with no social support network, cannot be reached by MFI in this way. So, although MFI does reach women who are poor, it cannot, by definition, reach the poorest, those who are cut off from society. To use Sen’s terminology, those without any capabilities to initiate their own development.

³ Interviews held for INTRAC research into relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs, September 2002.

Multiple Exclusion: Women and HIV/AIDS - There is also another dimension to the role of Northern NGOs in including the extremely poor. This is that people are often excluded on more than one basis. This was mentioned at the outset of this paper, whereby Sen argues a combination of lack of capabilities make the individual still more poor. NGOs could be argued to have a special role in highlighting the complexities of multiple exclusion. This has two facets; through lobbying other development actors to recognise the importance of multiple exclusion. The other facet is through the NGOs' own policy and programming guideline, through which they can lead by example. Many NGOs are already doing this.

A precise example of this is the double minority of HIV/AIDS and gender. HIV/AIDS is not only driven by gender inequality - it entrenches gender inequality, putting women, men and children further at risk. Defining and stigmatising those 'at risk' as men who have sex with men, sex workers and drug users has until recently obscured the increasing infection rate among people generally thought to be 'safe', including married and older women. The dominant risk factor is now heterosexual sex. It is estimated that almost 50 per cent of those living with HIV and AIDS are now women (UNAIDS, 2002). 'As individuals and in their social roles as mothers and carers, women are now disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS,' (IDS 2002 pp1). The complex nature and magnitude of the HIV/AIDS epidemics and the gender dimension requires a co-ordinated response that occurs at all levels, encompasses different approaches, such as service delivery, capacity building, research and advocacy, and is incorporated into all sectors. In South Africa the Joint Oxfam HIV/AIDS Programme (JOHAP) has, through dialogue and funding, supported partner organisations in mainstreaming an approach to gender and HIV/AIDS in all their work. It is also lobbying the South African government to recognise the multiple exclusion of gender and HIV/AIDS.

Gaps between NGO Policies and Practices

Yet, despite the examples above of what NGOs are doing to include specific excluded minorities, many argue there are gaps between what NGOs say they will do and what they actually do. In fact some go so far as to say that NGOs, 'rarely reach the poorest.' (Streeton 1997 pp193) Streeton argues that NGOs have many positive aspects, but their role in civil society is complex and the benefits they offer are those of advocacy and lobbying, rather than directly eradicating poverty at the grassroots. Harriss-White agrees that most NGOs are 'complicit in this neglect' of the extremely poor. She draws from research she undertook on extreme poverty for ActionAid in India. Her primary field-work was with beggars in rural Chhattisgarh State and with the homeless in Delhi. Her conclusion states that NGOs rarely do anything to bring the extremely poor a comprehensive solution. Instead they are piecemeal and short-termist in their approach (Harriss-White 2002 pp17) and do not reach the poorest.

There are a number of interpretations of the gaps between NGO policies and practices. Firstly, there exists an argument that says Northern NGOs often reinforce old elites without realising they are doing so. By building a relationship with a Southern NGO it is not always easy to identify the nature of the organisation with whom they are

negotiating. For example, individual led Southern NGOs focusing the power and control on one person or elite can easily mask the nature of their organisation, at least at first. Fowler highlights this as a problem in his work, (Fowler 2002 pp17) and Streeton also emphasises it as a force against NGOs including the poorest (1997 pp196).

Secondly, in attempting to reach the poorest, NGOs are reaching the layer above the chronically poor. For example, in some cases, in attempting to reach the poor by school building programmes, combined with inoculation programmes and adult literacy programmes the Northern NGOs are continuing to exclude the chronically poor. This is because they exclude those who cannot go to school because they have no one to pay for them to go, or girls who have to work in the home whilst male siblings go to school, or those outside of a family structure. The accusation, therefore, is that NGOs reach the middle poor, rather than the extremely poor.

Thirdly, Northern based NGOs are often top down in terms of power relations. In other words, the control of resources, knowledge and political power stays with the more powerful, often Northern NGOs. This means that Southern NGOs have two choices: to say they will stick to the Northern NGOs' policy, whilst doing what they feel is best at field level. Or the NGO can accept the policy, attempt to have a voice in policy decision making and use the Northern NGOs' approach as best it can in the field context. An example might be as follows: Southern NGOs often encounter or build relationships with Christian based Northern NGOs. These are said to be just as limited in their reach to the poor as secular NGOs and the reason often cited by Southern participants is the nature of power relations. A specific example that illustrates a frequent experience of top-down power relations is:

I welcome Christianity, but I don't discover Christianity in their actions, I discover great power politics. The sovereignty of Third World countries is being lessened. I fear that we have the weakening of sovereignty without the transfer of power to the grassroots...Power is restricted into the hands of this handful, coming essentially from the middle classes, urban, educated, and male, mostly. It has not empowered the poorest of the poor, which was the *raison d'être* of setting up a new class of NGOs. (ex-academic founder of a large Southern NGO working with the rural poor) quoted in Mawdsley et al (2002 pp91)

In this way, there is felt to be a top down power imbalance between the North and South that makes it all the harder to actually engage with eradicating poverty for the extremely poor.

Evidence from the recent INTRAC research into relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs suggests a gap between policy and what actually happens on the ground. In researching MS Denmark's Tanzanian partners it was found that women, children, the elderly and those with HIV/AIDs appeared to be excluded from development initiatives.

This was despite explicit policy to the contrary (MS 2001a). The partner representatives from the organisations researched were all middle class, able bodied, employed men. A special request had to be made to meet the women's group of two of the NGOs. Both groups had less priority than the men's group and were seen as separate entities. Despite the fact that much capacity building has been done by MS Tanzania with partners, the stark fact remained that women were not integral to the development that they were engaging with. What this means in practice is complex and not the subject of this paper. Suffice it to say that women were neither prioritised in development planning and processes, nor were they in positions of power. Meanwhile, MS Tanzania has been aware of the complexity of exclusion within its partner organisations for some time. MS prioritises capacity building with partners and has an extremely positive relationship with them (Harris-Curtis 2003).

However, it is at this point that the gap becomes clear. Anecdotal evidence abounds as to operations within one NGDO that are inclusive, whilst other work, within the same NGDO, is exclusive. MS Denmark is a case in point. The organisation has a strong inclusive element to its policy, based on a history of anti-apartheid lobbying and active advocacy. MS has many years of inclusive practice in terms of its operations of racial minorities in extreme circumstances. For example, MS' work with minorities originated in 1956 with MS being instrumental in the foundation of an umbrella organisation called the Danish Refugee Council. The work commenced with immigrant workers who arrived in Denmark in the 1960s from Turkey, Yugoslavia and Pakistan. Since then, MS has consciously expanded the inclusive nature of its work with racial minorities. The belief in including minorities at home and in engagement with developing nations is founded on the interpretation that nothing will be achieved without such inclusion. 'MS believes that it is necessary to do something concrete for groups of people whose situation is the result of an unjust world order – in this case ethnic minorities in Denmark' (MS 1995 pp17). In 1989 an Ethnic Minority Consultant was engaged to develop MS inclusion policy on minorities. Since then, in 1993 the work became a separate area under the General Secretariat. In the field the inclusion policy is interpreted within the specific national plan of MS Denmark. In the case of MS Tanzania, work is concentrated on the Masaai land rights campaign and gender and development among ethnic minorities.

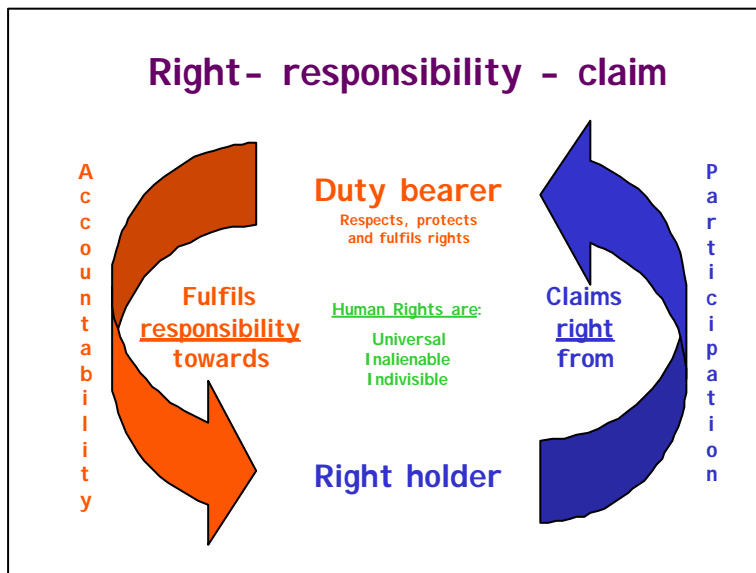
This paradox is one of the complexities of NGDOs operating in the South. There are many gaps and inconsistencies between policy and practice of NGDOs. However, most NGDOs are the first to recognise this. They usually strive for transparency, in order to be accountable and are at the forefront of impact analysis. The more transparent they are, the more change they can accommodate. Furthermore, in the INTRAC research, it was found that MS is a very popular NGDO with partners, because it respects the views of the local population and tries to incorporate all in the development process. Yet, is there anything significant in NGDO thinking, including that of MS, that could make the development process still more inclusive?

Inclusion, NGOs and the Right to Development

To many human rights specialists it is strange that there is still exclusion within development policy and programming because the right to development has been established for decades. The right to development stipulates that everyone has the right not to live in extreme poverty. In 1966 the UN passed two human rights covenants. One was on civil and political rights and was ratified by many nations, including the USA. The other was on economic, social and cultural rights, which had the support of the then socialist nations. Since the end of the cold war there has been a convergence between civil and political and economic, social and cultural rights. This culminated in 1986 when the UN passed the Declaration on the Right to Development. This affirms the indivisibility of civil, political and economic, social and cultural rights. Although this declaration does not have that much support from the richer nations, it put in place the international law stating clearly that everyone has the right not to live in extreme poverty. Therefore, if the right to development for all, especially those previously excluded, has been established for so long, why are inclusive policies not in the majority in development processes?

Prior to answering this question, an explanation of rights approaches to development, as embodied in the 1986 convention is needed. There are many interpretations, but one that has been honed and used by Save the Children is below:

Diagram 1 – The Structure of a Rights Approach to Development



(Theis 2003 pp2)

The diagram above depicts the relationship of different actors within the development process, according to a rights approach. Every individual is a right holder and there are a variety of duty bearers that should facilitate the inclusion of individuals in development and their claim to the right to development. Duty bearers are the national government

and state institutions, the international court of law, civil society organisations, NGOs, the military and the individual themselves. In claiming rights individuals have the obligation to respect others' rights and the mediation of conflict with others is other duty bearer's responsibility.

As regards why rights approaches have not been adopted wholesale, by all bi-laterals, part of the answer lies in the fact that not every nation signs up to every convention. It may be true to say that many governments from north and south have ratified the right to development, and related conventions. Furthermore, many CSOs and NGOs have taken on the convention and used it in their policies and programming. However, there are deviators from the national signatories. Notably absent is the government of the United States. The US has not ratified the International Convention on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, or the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, or the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The reason appears to be that civil and political rights are more convenient for the US government as they do not hold the US accountable for development failures in poor nations (Theis 2002). So what are the US scared of? The word 'rights' instils a certain amount of fear, because rights are implicitly and explicitly political. Many governments do not like the word 'rights' used in bids and tenders for work to be done in their countries. This is because the discussion of economic, social and cultural rights has inherent within it the belief that the status quo of the 'haves' and 'have-nots' needs changing. Instead of the compassionate richer nations giving 'charity' to the poor countries, a rights approach asserts that each poor person has both the right and duty to obtain their right to development. (Slim 2001, pp18) This is compounded by the belief that it is the duty of the state to give access to everyone's economic, social and cultural rights. It is interesting to note that the old dichotomy of right versus left political standpoints seems to have been replaced by those who believe in and support economic, social and cultural rights and those who do not. Both are political standpoints, they are just part of different epochs (argued in Harris-Curtis 2003).

Linked to this is, therefore, the issue of accountability within the issue of power. Being held accountable means a government or organisation has to not only be transparent, but take responsibility for its actions. Therefore, another part of the answer as to why rights approaches are not universally adopted is due to the accountability aspect of rights. A rights approach to development is inclusive because it holds accountable a duty bearer who is exclusive in the name of development. In other words, rights are about making duty bearers accountable. This is done through international law, in the form of the international covenant of 1986, and related UN conventions. '...addressing all rights in terms of their economic, political and social contexts, and holding all actors accountable, constitute critical steps towards challenging the conditions that create and tolerate impoverishment and repression across the globe'(Jochnick quoted in Russell 2002, pp6). The human individual is central to the a rights approach to development, regardless of disability, gender, age, culture, religion, caste or class, or anything else that may make them 'traditionally' excluded. At the same time, the individual is an active participant in their own development, rather than a passive recipient of aid. Duty bearers who do not wish to bear the responsibility of rights, find the accountability aspect of economic, social and cultural rights problematic. Specifically, this is because in a rights based approach

the individual can hold an organisation or government accountable for an unjust status quo that excludes them from the development process. The Maastricht Guidelines give clear rules on this:

‘Like civil and political rights, economic, social and cultural rights impose three types of obligations on states: the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil’ human rights.
(Maastricht, Supra no.10,1997)

The mechanisms within the international human rights framework are still at a formative stage, ‘ and there are no punitive measures that apply to duty bearers who do not accept this responsibility’ (Frankovits 2002 pp13). This is a gap in the argument for rights approaches that sceptics leap upon. It is however interesting the extent to which shaming national governments in the field of rights has won recognition of the right to development in the field. However, it is currently possible not to respect, protect and fulfil these rights by governments and other duty bearers, if they choose. Examples of how specific fights for specific rights within the context of rights have spurred governments into action will be explored later.

Earlier in this paper was a section entitled, ‘NGDO Policies on Inclusion and Extreme Poverty’(pp5-10). In this many examples were given of NGDO inclusivity. What was omitted was to say the majority of the organisations cited are committed to rights based approaches today. World Vision’s rights approach is very different from CARE’s, which is different from that of the Oxfams and Saves. The Northern NGDO that is committed to rights, has a history of involvement with minority rights and yet does not have a rights approach is MS Denmark. This was not done consciously. It was merely that when searching amongst Northern NGDOs the literature found and anecdotes collected concerning inclusion and the poorest and marginalised seemed to derive from rights based organisations. However, the fact is that inclusion of the extremely poor and marginalised seems to coincide with rights approaches. Many practitioners argue that this is no coincidence. They say this is because rights approaches embody the best of good practice; that which challenges the status quo and hands the power over the development process to the poorest sections of community. It is argued that without challenging the balance of power poverty can only be alleviated, not eradicated.

It is not the purpose of this paper to show the intricacies and counter-arguments involved with rights approaches. Instead, what is wished is to argue that a rights approach to development may be, by its very nature, an inclusive approach to involving the extremely poor in the development process. Therefore a précis of what is different about rights approaches to development, when compared with other approaches, is particularly useful:

- Rights are long-term and ‘progressive’ (Frankovitz 2002 pp11). To realise rights is going to take decades. It cannot be achieved through a project mentality, it has to pervade all parts of the development process.

- Rights approaches to development recognise everyone as equal and entitled to claim their right to development.
- Rights approaches go further than participation by saying that without the poorest and marginalised being involved poverty eradication will simply not occur.
- Rights are tied into an accountable infrastructure, that of international law. In theory, no longer can development actors get away with not facilitating the right to development for the poorest.
- Rights approaches see the individual as active, not passive in the development process.
- Rights approaches recognise the multi-faceted nature of 'capability deprivation'.
- Rights approaches recognise that poverty is to do with lack of power; without the support to assert their rights the individual has no power.
- Rights approaches state that one individual's development cannot be at the cost of someone else's livelihood.
- On page 4-5 of this paper a universalist approach to development is discussed. If this incorporates a rights approach then, the argument can be, that both the grassroots level and the universal level become linked. This is because the same international rules are the basis of both the grassroots and the national level development process.

Clearly, all of this is in theory. There is still much debate as to whether rights approaches are viable at all, and in all cases (Bratt 2003 pp1). This is healthy and prevents complacency and a tick box approach to rights rhetoric. Many are concerned about the rapidity of NGOs signing up to rights approaches, as if a panacea to exclusion, 'I am not at all convinced that international NGOs will do more than pay lip service to a rights-based approach' (Hammock, 2002 pp2). More still are concerned that rights approaches are being used without any real understanding of either the conceptual level, or the practical implications, (Uvin 2002 pp23-27).

However, whatever the sceptics say, there is a move towards including the most poor through rights approaches. The last thirty years have seen NGOs transform from a technical assistance, needs based approach to development to more participative work with a facilitating approach. As we have seen above, the alternative method for including the extremely poor is increasingly argued to be through rights approaches. However, although there are many examples where inclusion has succeeded through rights approaches, there is no empirical evidence of success stories for entire NGO operations. It is very piecemeal. Yet this does not take away from that fact that it has been NGOs who have been at the forefront of lobbying for and facilitating the right to development. A combination of sector specific NGOs, such as Action on Disability in Development (ADD), Helpage International and Plan International, together with civil and political rights organisations such as Amnesty and Human Rights Watch, plus international NGOs have all contributed to raising consciousness about inclusion issues on the basis of the right to development. It is doubtful whether bi-laterals such as DFID, NORAD and SIDA would have been as enthusiastic in their current embrace of rights approaches had the groundwork not been done by NGOs and practiced in the field by them.

How NGDOs are Including the Extremely Poor through Rights Approaches in the South

A possible answer to the question of why inclusion is not a reality is that many development actors are arguing inclusion can only happen if a rights approach is adopted. We have looked at what comprises a rights approach, let us now turn to proof of inclusion in the field. To illustrate Northern NGDOs development, use and research into rights approaches in order to include the extremely poor four cases will now be examined.

CARE – CARE has an explicitly rights approach to development that is contained in their mission statement. The political nature of rights is discussed above. It is interesting that a huge organisation like CARE has sought to clarify that rights are political in nature. This means they are taking a clear stance, which also means they will not always be popular:

As an independent humanitarian organisation CARE must be non-partisan. More problematically, we have interpreted our commitment to neutrality as a commitment to be apolitical (ie to avoid any contact with or input into public affairs or matters of governance). Our presumed apolitical nature has counselled against standing up for communities whose rights are not respected, protected, and fulfilled, because doing so is inevitably being political in the sense of challenging those (often powerful) actors responsible for abuses. But the fact is that CARE's interventions are always and inevitably political, in the sense that they affect the balance of power and rights approaches challenge us to be more intentional in how we affect political structures and systems.

(O'Brien and Jones 2002 pp46)

CARE is one of the first organisations to have a thorough training programme, complete with a readily available participants' workbook and facilitators' guide, for use in all of its country offices. At the time of writing, much work has been done to build the capacity in its 12 member countries.

Research has been commissioned to evaluate the impact of CARE's rights approach, such as the Action Research in Sierra Leone with Social Science Research Council as a research partner. This focuses on the right to food, article 25 of the covenant on economic, social and cultural rights. It also targets the most vulnerable and excluded groups in society. Amongst the initial findings was that the most vulnerable were indeed excluded, and that entrenched power groups were very unwilling to change this status quo (Archibald 2002 pp13). Furthermore, there was no open forum for the excluded to

become involved; they were marginalised at all levels. In short, CARE facilitated an open forum at community level that included those who have been excluded in the past. Through this an inductive approach was adopted, whereby those who were usually ignored were explicitly involved in information exchanges through a CARE organised forum. Via this means a strong message of the principle of equitable and transparent distribution of resources, especially in the conflict situation, was iterated and then reiterated. This sent a strong message about social inclusion and common humanity (article 1 of the covenant on economic, social and cultural rights). It also reinforced the importance of mechanisms for fair distribution and the misappropriation of resources. The challenge for CARE was – and still is - to maintain this impetus and facilitate communities in keeping the forum going.

This is a specific example through which CARE is sure that a rights approach was the only means through which the hitherto excluded could be included, partly because the legal infrastructure (ie the articles) were there to be referred to at every turn. Through this rights approach CARE ‘seeks to address factors contributing to their (the extremely poor’s) exclusion’. (www.careinternational.org.uk/cgi-bin/display?project.html updated September 2002)

Save the Children – Save is the leading child rights NGO. National offices have much autonomy and ‘Save-UK and Save-Sweden have been particularly active in promoting rights approaches’ (Jochnick and Garzon 2002 pp8). A recent workshop held by Save-Sweden re-confirmed that many development actors are frustrated that not more is being done to analyse the long-term impact on inclusion of rights approaches. Most of the participants had worked in the field with rights approaches for many years and are struggling with the practical day-to-day challenges of rights. They expressed a frustration of a questioning of the approach, when they know it is working to include those previously excluded. What participants wanted was to ascertain the extent of the inclusion that has been achieved, and by what means, to learn from that.

One of the agreements coming from the workshop was that probably the most important contribution Save is making to the discussion on extreme poverty, inclusion and rights issues is the evolving of appropriate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Clearly without clear processes to assess impact, output, efficiency, effectiveness, change, accountability structures, organisational learning needs, relationship building needs or advocacy requirements there is a weakness in rights based approaches. There is great importance given by rights approaches to accountability and responsibility, as seen in the diagram on page 13 of this paper. One aspect of this is ‘The effective collection and dissemination of data about unfulfilled rights and about rights violations puts pressure on duty bearers to meet their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights’ (Theis 2003 pp3). A second aspect is that, like other monitoring and evaluation work, the organisation in question can reflect on the successes and challenges of its work in the field and learn from it. A third aspect results from this latter point; as Save are ‘trailblazing’ in terms of monitoring and evaluation of rights approaches, others wish to learn from their experience.

Save has identified the crucial facets of monitoring and evaluation of rights approaches as:

- identifying duty bearers
- identifying the responsibilities of those duty bearers
- changing the approach to measuring changes in people's lives from statistically based indicators, such as infant mortality, to indicators such as 'access to health facilities for those under 5 years of age' with a sub-set of indicators that produce the required measurement.
- disaggregation by region, age, gender, religion, caste (if appropriate), disability and sexual orientation of data to emphasise the exclusion of certain sectors of society.
- a common set of indicators for monitoring and evaluation of rights approaches needs defining by those engaged in the process to facilitate cross-comparisons in the long-term.

Context specificity needs to be built in to the indicators. For example, Save has found that protecting children from sexual exploitation in Cambodia requires a specific combination of stronger law enforcement. On the other hand, in Sierra Leone, the control of children's involvement in the 'conflict diamond' trade and the child soldier problems, require a specific set of indicators that are not relevant to other contexts.

What is more, Save identifies that monitoring the changes in the situation of excluded groups is vital to measure progress – or reversal – towards the inclusion and participation of disadvantaged groups in society. Therefore, changes in excluded peoples' lives and their organisations need benchmarking. Save also advises that in all monitoring and evaluation programmes should be evaluated for success in reaching groups that are marginalised within society. What is more, the evaluation should be undertaken by the representatives of marginalised groups themselves (Theis 2003 pp6).

ActionAid – Originally a child sponsorship NGO, ActionAid has moved towards broader thematic development issues with rights as a guiding force. Rights approaches were first discussed in national offices in the late nineties in places such as India and Kenya (ActionAid 2001). Although ActionAid is decentralised and the national organisations are autonomous, all have adopted rights approaches. One of the most successful examples is that of India. According to one employee, it has brought a new culture to ActionAid India, with changes to programmes, such as cutting services in favour of advocacy, greater accountability to communities and a more assertive role in facilitating development⁴. An example of how ActionAid India is reaching the extremely poor in a way it could not have done when it did not have a rights approach is as follows:

The ActionAid right to food campaign in India has been high profile during the last two years. Under state policy citizens have the right to development. Yet these are not legally articulated within the Indian system. So, the reported cases of death through starvation continue, for example in Rajasthan or Orissa. Through the right to food campaign ActionAid India has moved the courts via Public Interest Litigation to ensure

⁴ Informal interview with Sandeep Chacha of ActionAid India, during Stockholm Rights-based Workshop 12-14/2/03.

the state recognises its responsibility to provide a livelihood for all. The courts have ordered the government to set up a monitoring mechanism to ensure that the right to food is being carried out. ActionAid has taken this further. They have again used the courts to ensure that while the able bodied can work, those who are disabled, elderly or children, also have a right to food covered by social security. Legislation has now been passed. The right to food campaign is now moving towards operationalising the right to work and lobbying is beginning that blends the right to work with the right to food. Through appropriate communication groups from across the nation, including poor people's organisations, and minority rights groups, civil society organisations are coming together for 'the week of action' in April 2003 to raise consciousness about the issue of the right to food once more (Chacha 2003 pp4). It has clearly been the feeling that rights have been talked of in ActionAid Delhi for a long time. Furthermore, it is the India office that influenced the wider ActionAid family into adopting rights approaches in the first place, for the simple reason that a rights approach is the only way to include the marginalised and disadvantaged.

A significant feature of ActionAid's 'Emergencies Strategy 2000-2003' has been the adoption of a rights-based approach. Through sticking to the Sphere Project principles, which are rights based, it is felt that the combination of ActionAid rights policy and the Sphere guidelines leads to far more inclusion of the marginalised. An example of how adopting rights approaches has become more inclusive is in the addressing of the dramatic denial of women's and children's rights in the context of emergencies. Although considered a war crime, the deliberate use of rape and sexual violence as a weapon of combat and humiliation is commonplace in conflict situations. Yet, it is not just their civil and political rights that are abused. Women and children are usually excluded from food distribution mechanisms in refugee camps. This can lead to women taking up prostitution as the only way of accessing food aid. A rights approach looks at such excluded people, assesses the different rights that are being denied and addresses the critical issues of protection, vulnerability and access to rights. Without a rights approach, women, children and other vulnerable disadvantaged sectors of society are excluded (Morago-Nicolas 2000 pp2).

Concern Worldwide – Concern has come to a rights approach by finding that best practice was inherently rights based, but this had been implicit and has only recently been recognised. As a result of finding this to be the case in many of its programmes, Concern is, in 2003, in the final stages of adopting a rights approach (Concern 2002). One of the many examples of how Concern came to realise a rights approach was the only way to include the extremely poor and those usually marginalised is as follows:

At the time of writing the Royal Government of Cambodia is finalising the new sub-decree on community forestry. This new law provides the legal protection of the rights of Cambodian farmers to manage traditional forests surrounding their villages. The recognition of these rights will bring dramatic effect to millions of rural Cambodians who often feel powerless in their struggle against extreme poverty. Interestingly, Concern, who funded and advocated for the drafting of the law, began its forestry work in Cambodia with a needs approach. This case is, therefore, an example of how inclusion

could only be achieved via a rights approach (Williams 2003 pp5). Concern found that the key to extreme poverty in the Komgong Chnang province was through local community forest management. This was because, with the emergence from the civil war in 1992 one of the main challenges was the deforestation and the social and economic consequences of that. The most important consequence for the extremely poor, usually women and children, was that they had to walk long distances to collect sufficient wood to boil water and cook rice. Through a local community forest management committee rules were set for managing forest land in a sustainable way, with Concern's support. What was decided was that people could not cut down trees without express permission from the committee. Instead they must be allowed to grow to maturity and harvest only fallen branches and deadwood. Larger trees would provide shade for the forest plants and vines to flourish, which could then be sold by villagers. Animals were also banned from grazing these protected areas.

In a matter of four years the road through Kompong Chnang changed from a dusty track to being bordered by the shade of the protected forest. This programme flourished also because the Local Government Department of Forestry had been convinced, through lobbying, to see this as a test case. Cambodian law had always stipulated that forest was owned by the Government. However, this 'test case' situation was not open-ended and the community management committee soon realised they could lose the forest again once the Forestry Department's attention was diverted elsewhere. So, with the support of Concern, they decided to group together with other village committees who had copied their 'test-case' and lobby the Government. Although it was difficult to bring the disparate villages together initially, loss of forest continued apace outside of the original Concern-supported forestry programme villages and they joined forces out of fear.

At this point Concern invited the Government of Cambodia to meet NGOs and community representatives in a National Community Forestry Workshop to highlight the legal obstacles to community forestry management. This was the critical moment for Concern and the Cambodian villagers, the emphasis suddenly switched from a needs focus to a rights focus. They felt that without the legally recognised right to own the forest they would never be able to sustainably develop their communities and reach the very poorest and marginalised, who always suffered most from the deforestation. In response to the workshop the Government requested Concern to facilitate the participation and establishment of a Task Force to develop a community forestry Sub-Decree. Concern provided financial and technical support to this and was a member of the Secretariat. The Sub-Decree is expected shortly. 'This could be seen as an example of a rights based success, developing from a needs-driven programme' (Williams 2003 pp5).

It is this, together with other similar instances, that led Concern Worldwide to work towards building their own rights approach policy. Concern has always prioritised the extremely poor and makes this its first priority of the 2002-2005 Strategic Plan (2002b pp5). Also within the plan is that they are going to do this through adopting a rights approach (2002b pp13). Yet, Concern recognises that, 'there is work to be done in terms of understanding the implications for our work.' (2002b pp13). Interviews with those

working for Concern confirm that there is a recognition of an added value of rights approaches, but it is not entirely clear what that is, as yet.

Interestingly there is a stark omission from Concern's strategy. Whilst there is a clear inclusion of gender and HIV/Aids, there remains no prioritising or mainstreaming of the disabled. This is a paradox which may or may not have been recognised within Concern: it is not possible to have a rights approach if all sectors of the extremely poor are not included within the development process. Apparently there is to be an 'equity focus' that will make Concern's policy and strategy closer to the inclusive nature of most rights approaches. However, the fact that Concern feels it has a rights approach without having already in place the 'equity focus' proves maybe two things. Either that rights approaches evolve and progress, or that NGDOs are taking on rights approaches without seeing the vital point of rights being inclusive by nature.

Conclusion

There are four main conclusions that can be drawn as regards the role NGOs play in alleviating extreme poverty by including the weakest and poorest. Firstly, extreme poverty and exclusion go hand in hand. Without recognising the power inequalities involved at every level of poverty development actors are glossing over the reality of the bases of 'capability deprivation'. This leaves specifically Northern NGDOs in an awkward situation, because rights are all about power. No longer is just scraping at the surface of poverty assuaging the guilt of the richer nations, whilst not including the extremely poor in the development process. Development is slowly being seen as more complex than that. For example, today the poor are increasingly knowledgeable. A case in point is the rights dialogue which has partly come from the 'bottom-up', as is asserted by many practitioners in and/or from the South. So it is they who are teaching the Northern NGDOs about rights approaches. As a result, increasing numbers of Northern NGDOs are celebrating this knowledge through adopting their own rights approaches, through their southern partners' interpretations. However, power is an unsettling political topic for some organisations. Suffice it to say that there are many arguments for not mainstreaming rights approaches for religious, political or sheer convenience, in circulation at the time of writing simply because rights are about addressing the imbalance and injustice of power (see Harris-Curtis 2003a for elucidation).

Secondly, NGDOs are hugely eclectic. Lumping them altogether in arguments about exclusion or inclusion of the extremely poor is at its best reductive and at its worse utterly misleading. Few generalisations exist, two might be argued. On one hand NGDOs have been struggling with extreme poverty for many years, some have done better than others, it is not a new challenge to them. Furthermore, they have learned from that experience in terms of the extent to which they include the poorest. Many are currently building on such extensive knowledge. On the other hand, many are exploring rights based approaches to development as an alternative method by which inclusive development processes might become a reality, whilst incorporating best practice. The truth appears to be that each NGDO is inclusive in some elements of its work and exclusive in others. The ways forward for each Northern NGDO, therefore, is to identify what the best

method is for their organisation to include the poorest in all parts of the development process.

Thirdly, there are many Northern NGDOs that have constructed a rights approach and evolved it for years. This paper has given some examples of the policies and practices of such organisations. These NGDOs are doing much in terms of rights approaches and publishing practically nothing. This is unfortunate simply because strong empirical evidence of successes of including the extremely poor through rights approaches is sparse. It definitely exists, but it is not readily available. This might be because rights are happening on the ground, rather than in theoretical discussions. Certainly, the Stockholm Workshop inferred this to be the case. If NGDOs are committed to the assertion that only through rights approaches can the extremely poor be reached, then they need to publish more widely. Several organisations, such as Oxfam International and CARE, recognise this to be the case and are producing collaborative research. However, a great deal more needs to be done if the rights approach ‘lobbyists’ are to convince, through empirical evidence, those who do not see the approach as anything other than another ‘fashion’ in development.

This brings us to the fourth point. Like every other approach to poverty, a rights approach is no automatic panacea to the exclusion of the extremely poor. Despite the clear moral and legal basis that is argued at an international level by organisations as different as DanChurch Aid, ActionAid, Catholic Relief Services or DFID, a rights based approach will not reach the poorest if does not include the marginalised. There is also the possibility, horrible though it is, that the rights approach might be misconceived. Furthermore, constructively argued and substantiated rejection of rights approaches is imperative in order to keep analysis of the approach evolving. If Northern NGDOs fail to recognise the weaknesses and/or challenges in an approach that is gaining so much power in development circles, they will fail the extremely poor yet again. However, this time they might be made accountable.

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