

# **TRANSFORMING PARTNERSHIPS**

**The dynamics of North-South partnerships  
between development NGOs**

**- A report on research carried out in  
Rwanda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and the UK**



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# TRANSFORMING PARTNERSHIPS

## The dynamics of North-South partnerships between development NGOs

A report on research carried out in Rwanda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and UK  
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### 1. *Research into current experiences of North-South NGO Partnership*

Between 2003 and 2004, with financial support from Comic Relief, **Transform Africa** and its partner organisations undertook a **research programme** on the experiences of Southern NGOs (SNGOs) and Northern NGOs (NNGOs), exploring **the concept and practice of partnership**.

The **key problem** which the project sought to address was that **Northern NGOs often do not listen enough to their Southern partners**, but are far more influenced by their own funders, their fellow NNGOs, and their own internal dynamics. It can be argued that this leads to a development industry which uses the rhetoric of participation, but which in practice is Northern driven. This bias varies considerably between agencies, influenced as each is by agency culture, individuals and history, as well as the specific nature of the work in which they are primarily involved. Therefore, **three areas of research focus** were identified:

- the extent to which NNGOs consult with their partners on any major policy change,
- the manner in which agreements or Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are made,
- the extent to which NNGOs are open to requests for information from their partners.

These areas were selected because they are the **felt problems of Southern partners**, but also because they are strategic levers that may influence attitudes and thinking about development relationships in general.

The **overall goal of the programme** was to **improve the quality of relationships** between Southern and Northern NGOs, in order to **improve the quality of development work**. The specific **objectives** were to **encourage a targeted group of Northern NGOs to place more value on the contribution that Southern partners can make** to their own operations and to the development process at large.

### 2. *Research Enquiries*

Local opportunities and constraints meant that research was undertaken in different ways within different countries. While role-play and interpretation from vernacular languages were used in Rwanda, more formal focus groups were used in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, and mainly face-to-face interviews in the UK. Altogether 77 NGOs were consulted in Africa, all but 2 of which were in receipt of Northern funding. 15 of these were in Rwanda, 32 were in Tanzania, and 30 in Zimbabwe. In the UK, practitioners from 16 international development agencies participated in the research. The detailed reports from Rwanda,

Tanzania and Zimbabwe give technical detail on the specific research methodologies used in Africa, but in general terms the study utilised four main methods of data collection, namely desk studies, face-to-face interviews, semi-structured questionnaire sessions, and forums or focus groups. All Africa-based enquiries were grouped around a common questionnaire, covering:

- the extent to which NNGOs consult with their partners on major policy changes,
- the manner in which agreements or Memoranda of Agreement (MOUs) are made,
- the extent to which NNGOs are open to requests for information,
- proposals for possible approaches to beneficial relationship change.

### **3. Research Conclusions**

In general terms, the responses from SNGOs in Rwanda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe suggest that there is a wide gulf in perceptions as to the experience and health of development partnerships between SNGOs on one hand and NNGOs on the other. What appears to be **the same process is experienced and remembered by the different partners in very different ways**. Two key examples of this are:

- The process by which an NNGO consults with its Southern partner: the NNGO staff member tends to see the process as consultative and participatory, whereas the SNGO staff member views the process as one in which they are politely but firmly told there is a new Northern way of doing things, and thereby what is expected from them.
- Joint writing of proposals, which many NNGO staff view as one of the ways in which the fact that they work collaboratively with SNGOs can be demonstrated. The little subsequent changes that the NNGO may make prior to the submission of the proposal are only to increase the chances of that proposal being successful, especially given the current competitive climate. But, for many in SNGOs, the 'little' changes are an opportunity for the NNGO to re-direct the proposal so that what eventually gets funded bears hardly any relationship to the proposal initially conceptualised by the SNGO.

Many SNGO personnel felt that the **relationships** they had with their donors **were not truly 'adult to adult' but more like 'adult to teenager or young adult'** as one workshop participant put it. This was made the more obvious by the fact that many seemed to be resigned to the current modus operandi due to the fact that alternative sources of funding were not currently available. Many were also critical of the lack of co-ordination that they observed amongst NNGOs, which to some was indicative of the fact that many NNGOs had little local knowledge and were more interested in furthering the interest of their own NGO rather than tackling development holistically.

**NNGO** administrative capacities also came in for criticism, as many SNGO members complained about the **lack of organisational memory, feedback, and the late disbursement of funds** which had such a profound effect on programme delivery and effectiveness.

It was found that SNGOs provided **information to NNGOs** such as progress reports, organisational policies and structures, strategies, plans, financial and auditing reports. However, provision of information by SNGOs to NNGOs was determined by the kind of relationship that the two partners had; for example how close they were. They also mentioned other information such as organisations' policies, strategies, long- and short-term

plans as mostly demanded by NNGOs from the SNGOs during the early stages of partnership. Other information that SNGOs usually provide to NNGOs includes profiles of the project areas, current political and economic situation of the project areas, beneficiaries of the projects, methodologies and approaches that will be used during the implementation of projects, costs and other information of that nature. Sometimes they were required to provide donors with information on their other sources of funding, live stories related for the project, and information for advocacy work in the North.

There was a **feeling in the South that NNGOs do not listen to or involve their Southern partners enough in general development practice, despite rhetoric to the contrary.** When referring to Northern partners, many SNGO personnel tended to use the word 'funder' or 'donor' as opposed to 'partner'. This suggests that there have not been any major or fundamental changes in the structures upholding the relationships between Southern and Northern NGOs since Transform was involved in producing the Harare Declaration in 1998.

For their part, **most SNGO staff believed that NNGOs feel they are doing the best they can,** especially given the current funding environment, which is at best uncertain. This is especially true for the medium and small organisations who may not be household names and who face stiff competition from within their home country (UK). Coupled with the fact that many of the major organisations are funding SNGOs directly, the situation according to the smaller NNGOs becomes doubly tenuous. This crisis in funding is further compounded by the fact that they have to deal with 'aid fatigue' amongst the UK public, which is increasingly wondering what exactly happens to the money it donates for the 'alleviation of poverty'.

The **view from many SNGOs as regards their relationships with NNGOs is often diametrically opposite to the views emanating from UK NGOs** that have also participated in the project. There the opinion is generally that there are some inequalities, but that they (UK NNGOs) are trying their best to mitigate them, and that SNGO opinions do feed into the creation of mainstream development policy and practice.

**NNGO staff appear to see themselves as having to play a balancing act,** as regards the expectations from the Southern organisations that they work with on one hand and the funders on the other. 'They think that we have a lot of money', is one refrain that was often repeated as regards the Southern partners, and 'we have to work really hard in order to get funding'. So for some, **any criticism of the way NNGOs work with Southern partners is a real blow.** This is further exacerbated by the fact that the nature of 'development work' **has changed,** in that it has become **more 'technical'.** This fact puts **limits on the time that an organisation or an individual within an organisation is able to invest in the human contacts that are an essential component of building good, long-standing, and mutually beneficial partnerships.** These changes may not be fully understood or accepted by the Southern partners, which may make a relationship more likely to turn sour.

**For many NNGO staff, there are not many places for them to go for impartial advice should a relationship deteriorate.** This lack of support is often made worse by the desire to be seen as being fair to the Southern partners. Close to 75% of those interviewed in NNGOs felt that it **was refreshing to be able to discuss partnership issues away from the hustle and bustle of the demands of being a programme officer.** Whilst many organisations try very hard to work in partnership, the issues relating to such **relationships (be they related to power, race, agenda setting, or advocacy on behalf of the poor) tend to be overlooked in the day-to-day management of the development process.**

This leads to the situation found in many organisations, where board members have little contact with partner organisations and where ‘partnership’ is rarely discussed within board meetings.

#### **4. Recommendations for action**

Those in Africa who took part in the survey were asked if they had any recommendations on **how to help NNGOs listen more to SNGOs**. Some responses are listed below:

- **Systems and processes that allow Southern partners to contribute to NNGO strategy and policy should be put into place.** One example would be fact-finding visits by senior NNGO personnel, whereby they would listen to their Southern partners and be asked to account in respect of their organisation’s performance.
- **More NNGO field offices should be opened**, and where possible staffed by **local personnel** with a better understanding of local culture, language and needs.
- NNGOs and SNGOs should work together to come up with **different funding systems or formulas**. If the way that NNGOs work with Southern organisations is heavily influenced by back donors, then NNGOs can perhaps collectively come up with formulas of funding that are less top down and more flexible. Alternatively, SNGOs should fight for more direct funding from back donors.
- The **scope of partnerships** needs to be broadened to include more than just the funding relationship.
- There is need for much **more dialogue** between the SNGOs and their northern counterparts to **improve understanding of each other’s working environments**.
- There is need for regulating **standards to govern the conduct** of both Northern and Southern NGOs (similar to those applying to accountants and lawyers).
- **Local umbrella organisations** ought to be more involved in round-table discussions between SNGOs and their donors.
- **Contracts should be jointly written and binding on both sides**, and funds ought to be disbursed on time. Agreements should be written in a clear and concise manner, and where possible and appropriate in the local language.
- **NNGOs should try and ensure** that their governing bodies are inclusive and are not drawn from a narrow social group. Where finances and the law allow it, they should endeavour to have **Southern representation on their boards**.
- **Senior personnel from both NNGOs and SNGOs** should be required to **work or go on sabbaticals with a partner organisation**, so that they are better able to understand the day to day realities that that organisation faces.
- **NNGOs should debate issues relating to partnership** on a regular basis both within their organisations and as a collective body through the auspices of organisations such as BOND (British NGOs for Development). Where it is not possible to have input from all partners, they should **establish reference bodies of Southern partners** who may be called upon to comment on policy and strategy.
- **NNGOs should listen more to their partners in the South.** They need to recognise and respect SNGOs as real partners, valuing their work and experiences and sharing the decision-making processes. The **relationship should be based on mutual respect and collaboration as equal partners**, taking into consideration that each has a key role to play in the overall development process worldwide. Both NNGOs and SNGOs should work hard towards establishing a balanced partnership which would enable effective contributions from both sides in addressing social, economic, and political issues affecting poor people in developing countries.

- Both NNGOs and SNGOs need to **include beneficiaries and community groups in various processes**, e.g. project preparation, agreements, information sharing, because **their existence is the reason behind the existence of partnerships**. Beneficiaries can provide important inputs and feedback to NGOs and others.
- **NNGOs** should use their comparative advantage of easy knowledge access to **pass information to their partners in the South**. On the other hand, **SNGOs** should use their easy access to **local knowledge and experiences** and pass it **to their partners in the North**. Both need to assess the level of information exchange, and create systems of reporting and accounting that are bi-directional
- NNGOs should play a significant role in collaborating with SNGOs to **lobby big financial institutions such as World Bank, bilateral organisations and other government bodies**. The process should include **capacity building skills** for SNGOs by NNGOs, especially focusing on advocacy and lobbying work.
- **SNGOs** need to be clear and **build confidence in their mandate, vision, mission and values**. **NNGOs must recognise the legitimacy and autonomy of SNGOs**.
- **SNGOs** should create more strategies and efforts in order to **reduce dependency on NNGOs**. This would reduce the control of NNGOs over SNGOs, or a father-child type of relationship.

Although use of the term 'partnership' will continue to be highly admired and emphasised by both Northern and Southern development organisations, particularly those in the North, no one needs go deep to determine whether NNGOs and SNGOs have a real partnership or not. In general, **true partnership between NNGOs and SNGOs has a long way to go to become a reality**. Though there are some positive examples of true partnership between NNGOs and SNGOs, there are still many problems to address to improve the current situation. Common weaknesses that can easily be pointed out in such kind of 'partnership' include the **inequality of resources, lack of transparency, imbalances of information sharing, control of one partner over the other, and contracts or agreements which favour the interests of one partner more than the other**. Therefore, more radical changes are needed in order to build the move towards **effective, balanced partnership**. However, this will only work when both North and South, particularly NNGOs, are willing to go for **radical transformative change**. This is to say that, there is **a need for NNGOs to start a process of re-learning and critical self re-examining of their roles and responsibilities** in terms of their relationship with Southern partners in order to make the necessary changes.

## 5. **Research Outputs**

Information has been gathered and analysed on the experience of NGO partners in **Rwanda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe** and the **UK**. Separate research reports have been compiled for each geographical area, and a consolidated **summary report** is now available on request. All such material is freely available on Transform's website.



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## **1. CURRENT EXPERIENCES OF PARTNERSHIP**

### **1.1 Introduction - diverse perceptions in South and North**

When in 2000 Transform Africa submitted to Comic Relief its original funding application for research programme support, it summarised its case as follows:

*"This proposal is about practical improvements to relationships between Northern NGOs and their partners, as well as wider policy changes in the sector that will support improved relationships and hence improved development.*

*Over the last decade there has been increasing use of the term "partnership" to describe relationships between different development actors. As use of the term has increased, however, so has criticism of it. Much of this criticism has pointed to the inherent power imbalances that exist in many development relationships, particularly between Northern and Southern organisations. Southern organisations have challenged their Northern counterparts to think about these imbalances and have argued that the term partnership is not an accurate description of the reality of relationships in practice.*

*A number of Northern NGOs have begun to take on board some of these criticisms and to take steps to address them. However the commonly prescribed solution to unequal relationships is a model of "real partnership"<sup>1</sup> – to share values, be transparent etc. Recent research by Transform has found such idealised models often do not help this problem, in fact they can make things worse. Firstly they are prescriptive and do not recognise diversity of options. Secondly, and worse, we have found that arguments for more "dialogue" and "shared values" can lead to further "closeness" and hence further Northern influence.*

*It is hard to discuss such changes in a vacuum. A key aspect of debates on partnership is that they take place within both the culture and norms of the organisation concerned and the context of the culture and current norms of the Northern NGO sector and the pressures it is experiencing. We argue that the consequence of unequal relationships is that development is ineffective and that the potential of all actors involved is not realised.*

*Partnership debates relate to wider NGO policy. There seems to be a growing difference between a number of major Northern NGOs seeking to become "global players", who are changing traditional approaches to working with partners and are becoming more "strategic", centralised and managerial. These moves are being resisted by those who see development as political contested and complex and are alarmed at the underlying shift in values that appears to be taking place."*

### **1.2 Background information**

For quite some time, NNGOs have been working closely in collaboration with SNGOs, particularly in implementing development projects in the developing countries. This relationship was built around the slogan of 'partnership'. Although it is still advocated by NNGOS that their relationship with SNGOs is in a form of partnership, this fact seems to be doubted by most SNGOs.

Therefore, this research has sought to identify whether or not this doubt by SNGOs is reasonable. While there is a quantity of literature produced in the North on the subject of partnership (see section 2.1 and Appendix B), there has been inadequate analysis from Southern perspectives on the relationship between NNGOs and SNGOs, particularly on the aspects of information sharing and contracts of agreement.

### 1.3 Statement of the problem

Quoting again from the original Transform proposal submitted to Comic Relief for funding:

*"What is the problem we are trying to address? Here is one small case study that seeks to illustrate one part of the problem.*

A representative of a Northern NGO went on a project visit to an NGO in Uganda. At the time the African NGO was hosting a 3 day workshop with other local NGOs (part of which was to explore relationships with Northern NGOs). As a result of the visit from the representative the NGO staff were unable to attend the workshop they were meant to be hosting... Afterwards the host NGO discussed it with the Northern NGO representative, who was shocked they had not mentioned the event. The Ugandan NGO said they did not feel able to speak out, even though they had a long-standing relationship. They said, "it was against their culture" to turn him down. Further discussion revealed this seemed to mask a more fundamental problem - they felt unable to say no. Having realised the absurdity of the situation, the Northern NGO and the NGO were then able to explore some more sensible ground rules for future visits.

*This case study highlights the difficulties in negotiating relationships, and some of the deeper cultural and power hurdles to cross in this process. In our work we have come across many such stories, where relationships are negatively affected by often hidden power relationships and cultural difference. We are seeking positive ways of addressing these."*

Transform's recent research work in the South produced numerous parallel examples, and expressions of people's unhappiness and frustration with relationships characterised by imbalance and differing perceptions of the same processes.

For quite some time, Northern NGOs have been working in close collaboration with Southern NGOs, particularly in implementing development projects in developing countries. This relationship was built around the notion of 'partnership'. Although many if not most NNGOs refer to their relationships with SNGOs' 'partnerships', a large number of Southern practitioners would question this and tend to refer to NNGOs as 'funders'.

Therefore, this research has sought to analyse and assess what constitutes 'partnerships' between development organisations in the South and those in the North. It examines how both sets of organisations view the relationships that they have with each other. It has looked particularly at actual practice and the partners' differing perceptions in two areas

- the manner in which contracts, agreements and MOUs are drawn up and entered into by the two sets of organisations, and
- how the flow of information between the North and South is perceived on both sides.

#### **1.4 The overall goal and objectives of the programme**

The overall goal of the programme has been to contribute to an improvement in the quality of relationships between Southern and Northern NGOs, in order to improve the quality of development work.

The general objectives were defined as being to encourage a targeted group of Northern NGOs to place more value on the contribution that Southern partners can make to their operations and to the development process at large.

To this end the programme has sought to gather information and recommendations on key issues around the practice and perceptions of partnership between SNGOs and NNGOs, with a view to assisting in the improvement of this key area.

The specific objectives of the research programme have been:

- to examine the manner in which partnership agreements are drawn up, as well as the contents therein, and
- to examine the balance of information provision and sharing between NNGOs and SNGOs, and how both sets of NGOs utilise that information.

In so doing, research has been conducted to test two hypotheses:

- that the contractual terms and agreements entered into by Northern and Southern NGOs favour the interests of Northern NGOs, and
- that there is an imbalance as regards the provision and sharing of information between Northern and Southern NGOs.

## 2. A TOPIC ALREADY SUFFICIENTLY STUDIED?

### 2.1 Literature review

Analysis of the literature around the study brings up a number of pertinent issues to the current hypothesis that "inadequate or poor dialogue exists between NNGOs and the SNGOs they fund".

John Harriss (2000), in his book *Managing Development*, provides a brief synopsis as to how the development of partnerships came about. Harriss et al (2000) claim that partnership was seen as a shift away from a model of development which sought to intervene on behalf of the supposed beneficiaries to a model that saw them as integral part of the development process. The OECD's 1996 statement *Shaping the 21st Century: The Role of Development Co-operation* set out goals for development to the year 2015, and identified the strategies for achieving those goals as *partnership support of self-efforts, improved coordination and consistent policies*. These three aspects of partnerships are crucial and pertinent to this study. The question being asked is whether this is happening on the ground in the partnerships that exist between NNGOs and their Southern partners.

In a partnership, development co-operation does not try to do things for developing countries and their people, but with them. The OECD (1996) statement is useful in that it encapsulates the underlying principles for the Transforming Partnerships programme of Transform Africa - the belief that development should be owned locally and that the methods of co-operation should not undermine but, in fact, promote those beliefs. The statement is a useful tool in assessing to what extent current relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs meet those ideals.

However, Mary B. Anderson (2001) in an Oxfam publication, *Debating Development* brings up another dimension to the discussion. She assesses the shifts in development practice over the years. According to her, this shift is evident in the serial "renaming" of the people for whom aid is intended, beginning with "victims", then "recipients", then "beneficiaries" then "counterparts", and now "participants" or sometimes "clients". Mary Anderson claims that there is an inevitable inequality between those who will be giving and those who will be receiving aid. This inequality is evident from the fact that one side is able to give away its surpluses whilst another is in need. This situation is further compounded by the fact that those who are in a position to give can choose whether or not to do so, whereas those on the receiving end may not survive if they are refused the aid. This can be applied to relationships between NNGOs and SNGOs. Indeed, some NNGOs practitioners have actually stated that for every partner they are currently working with, there are at least ten who are waiting and willing to take their place. In the language of economics, "when demand outstrips supply, the supplier has a field day". Anderson believes that within current development practice, inequality is inevitable. What is needed is not to pretend that inequality does not exist but to acknowledge it and to try and identify the means by which these tensions can become "dynamic" and creative. Perhaps we can argue that the Transforming Partnerships Programme is very much such a process.

A study of relationships between NNGOs and SNGOs by *Development Associates* in Zimbabwe (2000) stated that:

- Because of local resources, SNGOs accept financial resources from the North at all cost. This can lead them to working with partners whose focus is unknown and sometimes different from those of the SNGOs.
- Lack of trust by NNGOs evidenced by insistence on their part on bringing external development workers, in the name of “volunteers” who neither could speak the local language, nor know the culture of the beneficiary communities. This was interpreted by some SNGOs as “planting” their own people to monitor certain activities.
- Donors were reportedly changing their focus without communicating with organisations they fund. This resulted in SNGOs also being forced to change their focus at short notice if they were to continue receiving funds. A case in point is that of the British Government's DFID, that has recently changed their funding so that they only fund advocacy work, not service delivery work. This is linked to their own development philosophy about the role of civil society in relation to the state. The question for lobbying here appears to be “Whose needs does advocacy work address? Is it a felt need of the poor in the South?”
- Some donors insist on reporting requirements that are “too rigid and involving”. The time spent in preparing the financial reports ends up consuming most of the organisation's time that could be spent on the NGO's core business.

## 2.2 The issue of power in partnerships

Lister (2001) comments that one key issue within partnerships of Northern and Southern NGOs is the inequality of power which may exist within the relationship. Research in Latin America concluded that “asymmetric” relationships are the rule and cannot be described as partnerships. The same author concluded that NNGOs were mostly interested in partnerships, which is only used by the powerful partner to describe the relationship, whereas the weaker “partner” describes the more powerful as their donor. Similarly NNGOs see SNGOs as partners, whilst SNGOs regard them as donors.

The issue of power shapes all aspects of partnerships. Wallace (2002) in “Knowledge, Power and Development Agendas” (INTRAC, Oxford) identifies three mechanisms, through which power is exerted. These are:

- Money – power comes from holding the “purse strings”, being a “gateway” to funders
- Language – namely the dominance of English in interactions between partners
- Means of communication i.e., the domination of writing media.

The discussion of power and empowerment is increasing in the development arena, especially with regard to partnerships. Several organisations have produced material on how to make North – South NGOs partnerships more effective. Such materials include policy statements, declarations and practical tool kits. Yet many of the issues, which were identified in the 1990s, remain issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Perhaps NNGOs and SNGOs have a lack of understanding of each other's work environment. There appears to be inadequate dialogue between the donors and their recipients.

Further, it appears that SNGOs' activities were not seen as a key success factor by the funders, whose apparent pre-occupation was around the recipients' ability to account on

paper for how money was spent. Should both parties not be concentrating on indicators of poverty reduction e.g. improved livelihoods, sustainable food reserves, etc?

Penrose (1994) provides a brief outline of ideas or philosophies that inform the current practice of working in partnerships, which she states were around the issue of international solidarity, a phrase we may find useful in the partnership. In her analysis of practical constraints, difference of values tends to manifest itself in the persistence of donor recipient's relationships despite the proliferation of rhetoric to the contrary. Generally SNGOs feel that NNGOs demand accountability from them, yet they are only accountable to their supporters and funders. NNGOs do not see the need to be accountable and transparent to the SNGOs and yet they raise funds in their names.

### **2.3 The case for ethics**

Development agents, whether in the North or in the South, work under codes of conduct and ethics. Julie Gale (2001) writes about the increase in members and in influence of NGOs in the South and in the North. She argues that this development has engendered a debate on issues related to NGO transparency, accountability and legitimacy. Gale states that this concern can be seen as an expression of concern as regards the rights of donors, supporters and beneficiaries (or clients) and also regarding NGO responsibilities to their various constituencies.

In particular, this distinct set of questions can be asked to NNGOs

- Are NNGOs honest and transparent when talking to their 'home constituencies' about what they need money for?
- Is the money they raise used for the purpose they stated?
- What proportion of their total budget reaches the beneficiaries?
- Who actually benefits from the bulk of NNGOs' budgets?
- In their programme and project work do, NNGOs behave in an ethical way towards their Southern NGOs and aid recipients?
- Are their programmes appropriate to local needs?
- Do they make a (positive) difference?
- If they do, how is impact measured and valued by beneficiaries?
- When NNGOs engage in advocacy, whose agenda are they pushing?
- Do they really speak on behalf of the poor?

These questions are crucial and central to this study, particularly as we look at the possible usefulness of the results of this programme in the long term. It is important to pose this question - "Do we as Transform believe that we desire to see a change in NNGOs' behaviour as part of our mission and values, or is there a danger that the programme would become a philosophical argument rather than an instrument for change?" This line of inquiry is crucial for this study, as we look at the actual process of lobbying. How does Transform hope to achieve change in the relationships between NNGOs and their Southern counterparts? Do we hope for a change of practice once the truth is told by research?

In assessing current development practice in Africa, Gariyo (1999) argues that SNGO development programmes are heavily influenced by NNGOs. He also states that people themselves have little influence over most of these programmes. In the section analysing NGOs and donor dependence in East Africa, Gariyo states that the links between East

African NGOs and their activities come from overseas. This is a situation which, according to Gariyo, tends to deprive SNGOs of a strong base in their own societies and contribute to their inability to plan for the long term. When one party gives always and the other receives, a certain mindset seems to develop. It starts between NNGO and SNGO level, and then filters from SNGO to the poor themselves. The poor could actually be put in a worse situation due to receiving assistance from a source so far away. In practice, experience has also shown that this assistance can be withdrawn with very little warning, when for example relationship between Governments sours or when NNGOs change their focus. This scenario paints a picture which leaves the question "does the development industry exist to alleviate the plight of the poor or not?"

Robert Chambers (2002) goes on further to state that even the widely-used Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), in which an outside development practitioner will be the active party in mapping and diagramming processes, will be using criteria to assess the needs of communities that have been formulated by experts elsewhere. In a study which monitored a PRA process in Sri Lanka, it was found that villagers only spoke for 11 out of 45 minutes and were interrupted 45 times during one such meeting. With this in mind (whether we call it dialogue, partnership or whatever) the actual dynamics are more subtle and complex.

Having said that, what then is this lobbying all about? Is it about creating more space for dialogue? Or is it about levelling the playing field between the givers and the recipients? Or shouldn't it perhaps be enough for SNGOs to expect better treatment, to be given more consideration and respect from those giving aid? Anderson does not offer many practical guidelines on how the "inequality" between donors and recipients might be tackled, but she offers some "touch-feely" or "soft" angles from which to tackle relationships between SNGOs and NNGOs. Anderson argues that:

- Areas of innate equality and inequality should be identified by reaffirming the essential human quality of both the giver and receiver.
- There should be acceptance of and clarity about the division of labour.
- It is necessary to manage anguish and joy simultaneously. The contradictions and tensions encountered within development practice might better be handled by acknowledging the suffering that prompts the need for aid as well as affirming the joys of life.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This review of academic literature and current debates was the background against which the current research was undertaken. It has brought up numerous issues of concern both to NNGOs and to SNGOs. Because the above documentation came predominantly from the North, the new research exercised a preferential option for NGOs in the South, seeking to encourage them to articulate and analyse their own experiences of partnership with Northern NGOs. At the same time parallel enquiries were made with a selection of NNGOs in UK, all having current experience of partnership relations with NGOs in Africa.

### **3. TRANSFORM'S RESEARCH APPROACH**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

A planning workshop was convened in Lusaka and was attended by 12 representatives from all seven Transform Network partners. The workshop was an opportunity to map out options for the project, to develop a clear and shared understanding of objectives, and to agree the strategies that would be used and the possible challenges that might be faced during the implementation stage. An independent advocacy expert from the UK facilitated the workshop.

The workshop was also used to decide which organisations within the network were best placed to lead and manage the implementation of the project. It was decided that Development Associates (Zimbabwe) would lead, in association with CASEC (Tanzania) with Transform Africa undertaking responsibility for activities to be carried out in Rwanda and the UK.

In designing the overall research process, it was felt extremely important for Rwanda to be included as it is currently the only mainly French-speaking country in the Transform Network. In addition, Rwanda remains one of the highest receivers of international aid on a per capita basis in Africa, a large proportion of which has been channeled into the country through international aid organisations.

#### **3.2 Selection of the research design**

Detailed work on problem analysis and task allocation was undertaken at a meeting held in Arusha. It was decided that a desk study and literature review would be carried out to record what had so far been written on development practice and more especially on partnerships between Northern and Southern NGOs. Another decision taken at this meeting was that in Tanzania and Zimbabwe, NGOs would be approached in order to ascertain which aspects of their relationships with Northern NGOs were viewed to be the most problematic and hence in urgent need of change.

The draft plans were then presented to a meeting in Kigali of the Transform Management Team, for feedback and peer review. This was followed by a meeting in Harare involving the five members of the core research team, to incorporate feedback from the Management Team and to finalise action plans regarding the implementation of the project.

The desk studies and literature reviews were conducted and interim reports produced. The main constraints encountered were that it was very difficult to access material on relationships produced in the South. Ironically perhaps, this highlighted the relevance of the project, which one could argue was an attempt at redressing that imbalance and an opportunity for Southern voices to be better heard.

The specific problem which the project sought to address was that Northern NGOs are often perceived as not listening enough to their Southern partners, but seem far more influenced by their own funders, their fellow NGOs, and their own internal dynamics. It can be argued that this leads to a development industry which espouses the rhetoric of participation, but which in practice is Northern-driven. This bias varies considerably between agencies,

influenced as they are by agency culture, individuals, history, as well as the nature of the work in which they are primarily involved.

Therefore, three areas of focus were identified:

- the extent to which NNGOs consult with their partners on any major policy change,
- the manner in which agreements or Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are made,
- the extent to which NNGOs are open to requests for information from their partners.

These areas were selected because they are felt problems of Southern partners, but also because they are strategic levers that may influence attitudes and thinking about development relationships in general. In the interview process, interviewees were asked a number of questions around the three areas of the research focus and asked to elucidate as to how they generally viewed the relationships that their organisations had with the NNGOs they worked with. At the end of the interview, they were asked whether they had any recommendations which they thought might improve relationships between SNGOs and NNGOs.

The research process in Rwanda was carried out using role-play and group discussions as well as semi-structured face-to-face interviews, with personnel from local NGOs in the Kigali area. All local NGOs invited were currently in partnership with more than one NNGO. The vast majority of participants (99%) spoke Kinyarwanda and French only, which meant that interviews and group discussions were conducted with the aid of an interpreter.

### **3.3 Sampling**

Basically the sample for this study was randomly selected, taking into account various categories, which included the following:

:

- all Transform and post Transform partners
- umbrella organisations in Zimbabwe and Tanzania
- donors and country representatives of the NNGOs
- due to time constraints, language problems and limited resources in Rwanda, convenient sampling was also used.

### **3.4 Characteristics of the research target group**

Characteristics of the interviewees in Africa have already been outlined above. The UK target group included development practitioners, programme directors and programme officers, and country representatives of donors in Africa. In the UK, practitioners from 16 international development organisations agreed to make inputs into the study. All organisations had partners in Africa, though the majority of them also worked with partners in other parts of the developing world, mainly South Asia and Latin America. The organisations themselves were varied and were of different sizes. The majority could be described as single issue NNGOs, although some worked in a variety of development areas. Of the organisations visited, three were based outside London, whereas two were field offices based in the Rwandan capital Kigali.

### **3.5 Agreed processes**

The study utilized four methods of data collection, namely desk study, face-to-face interviews, questionnaires and forums. The study was both quantitative and qualitative in design due to the nature and quality of findings expected.

Phase 1 looked at the conceptual framework of relationships between Northern NGOs and their Southern counterparts, drawing conclusions from findings of the desk studies.

Phase 2 identified key thematic areas in the relationships of Northern and Southern NGOs. This was done using qualitative data gathered in Zimbabwe and tested in all four African countries. These thematic areas formed the basis of the design of quantitative data gathering tools that were also used in all the countries. The thematic areas included agenda setting, information sharing, disbursement of funds, contracts and (for Zimbabwe) sustainability.

Phase 3 involved collection of data using the prepared tools. These were mainly interview guides and questionnaires (see Appendix A).

In Tanzania, Rwanda, and Zimbabwe, local NGO practitioners as well as NNGO managers/representatives were asked to provide an analysis of their relationships with their Northern partners in the areas highlighted above through written questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions.

The interviews for the most part involved personnel who were very closely involved in managing relationships with partners. In some cases a number of staff were involved including Directors. The interviews themselves tended to last for approximately one hour and divided into the three areas in which the research was focusing on - macro decision making, contracts and MOUs, and the provision of information from a Northern NGO to its Southern partners.

Forums were arranged in different formats in different situations. A lot of interest was generated amongst the respondents as indicated by large turn-outs and active participation.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

In terms of analysis of data collected, the Content Analysis Method was used to identify attitudes, perceptions, views and opinions about relationship between Northern and Southern NGOs, as well as suggestions for the way forward. All this was helpful for understanding and appreciating shifts and contradictions that may exist at various levels of behaviour:

- what NNGOs think about themselves in their relationships with SNGOs
- what SNGOs say NNGOs do during their relationships
- what happens in practice.

## **4. A DIVERSITY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The diverse detail of research enquiries in Rwanda, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and the UK are set out in separate documents (some of which contain detailed statistical analysis) that are available on the Transform Africa website - see Appendix C. This chapter attempts to draw out the key findings in a more brief and accessible narrative form.

### **4.2 Desk studies**

Desk studies were carried out mainly by Transform in UK, Development Associates in Zimbabwe and CASEC in Tanzania, and formed the basis for the literature review chapter in this document. A collation of the published sources that were used is to be found at Appendix B.

The main issues that came out of the desk studies were:

- the clear inequality in relationships between the North and South
- erratic self-regulation of NGO behaviour
- the lack of mediation facilities in the case of soured relationship between NNGOs and SNGOs, and the unclear role of umbrella organisations
- the challenge of partnership as an obligation rather than as an option
- the nature of participation in development - who is participating in development, and who is setting the agenda?

To a reader of this report who is well-versed in the partnership debate, the above issues may not appear particularly new. The point of this summary is that it records the background of published material against which the field research was undertaken.

### **4.3 Rwanda research findings**

Essentially, the research sought to find out to what extent Rwandan NGOs were (and felt) 'listened to' given their country's recent history, and what effect if any this had on relationships between Rwandan and Northern NGOs.

During group discussions, it was clear that there was an acceptance of the role that NNGOs play in the development process, mainly through the provision of funds but also through other means such as advocacy and capacity building. However, many SNGO personnel also felt that generally the relationships they had with their donors were not true 'adult to adult' but more like "adult to teenager or young adult" as one participant put it. Many seemed to be resigned to the current modus operandi, due to the fact that alternative sources of funding were not currently available. Many were also critical of the lack of co-ordination that they observed amongst NNGOs, which to some was indicative of the fact that NNGOs generally had little local knowledge and had more interest in furthering the interest of their own NGO than in tackling development holistically. Much of this criticism was exacerbated by the anger that is still felt about the behavior of some NNGOs during and after the 1994 genocide. It is felt that NNGOs were conspicuous by their absence and inaction during the genocide itself, but immediately afterwards flooded in to the country to

set up refugee camps and relief programmes. Due to the indiscriminate nature of this assistance, many of those who benefited most were people who had planned and perpetrated the genocide. More generally, NNGO administrative capacities also came in for criticism as many SNGOs complained about the lack of organisational memory, feedback, and the late disbursement of funds, which had such a profound effect on programme delivery and effectiveness.

Main findings from Rwanda can be summarised under three headings:

- *The extent to which NNGOs consult with their partners in a major policy change*

The level of Rwandan NGO involvement in the consultation processes of NNGOs before adopting major changes in policy is not high, and consequently unsatisfactory for the local NGOs concerned. All participants at the forum and all interviewees expressed their frustration at seeing themselves merely as implementers rather than originators or collaborators in the development process. They claimed that a situation in which a NNGO unilaterally changed policy or strategy was very common and one which challenged the very notion of partnership.

There does not seem to be co-ordination as to what kinds of projects or programmes will be funded in a given period. The impression that SNGOs have been given is of a surplus of NNGO funding for whatever is perceived as popular or fashionable at a given moment in time, while less popular but equally worthy or needed projects tend to be ignored. Thus there is a feeling that Rwandan NGOs are not listened to, because development sector agendas and priorities are created in the North, and not in the South as is claimed by most NNGOs. This is contrasted with the rhetoric of accountability and impact to which many NNGOs say they aspire.

Funding for core costs was another issue which was seen as providing evidence of the fact that SNGOs in Rwanda are not listened to, as it is one that they have been trying to address for a number of years. One interviewee asked 'what is the point of funding projects without making any provision for the people who are meant to implement the said project?'

When probed as to why Rwandan NGOs felt it was essential that they were listened to, participants at the forum said that it was an issue of ownership. 'It is difficult to implement somebody else's policy', stated a participant.

The research in Rwanda did not highlight any major differences as regards the practices of NNGOs with partners in the country although one British organisation was praised for its efforts in including its partners in some decision-making processes. This may have been because the organisation had an office in the country, a practice generally applauded by the forum participants who thought that it meant that the NNGO was generally more in tune with the realities of a particular country than it would otherwise be.

An additional point that came out strongly as regards Rwandan NGO participation in the development process was one that centres on the lack of trust. Many examples were provided in which NNGOs had a relationship with a particular individual within an organisation, and then seemed to be quite reluctant to continue working with the Rwandan NGO once that individual left. This seems to indicate a patronage system, in which some individuals are privy to secret information or are fortunate enough to wield some influence with their NNGO partners.

- *The manner in which agreements or Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are made*

80% of the Rwandan NGOs who participated in the research acknowledged the need of having agreements and MOUs, and stated that they were a means of formalising a relationship as well as clearly stating the expectations on both sides. However, the process that led to the signing of the documents was seen as rather tedious, with the SNGO having to provide what seemed an endless supply of paper work, in some cases even supplying the same information more than once. This is linked to the issue of organisational memory on the part of NNGOs. Some NNGOs were rather more flexible as regards the contents of agreements, but agreements and MOUs were seen as favouring the administrative needs of NNGOs rather than those of the Southern partner's. An example of this is the late disbursement of funds. A Rwandan NGO might be diligent enough to provide all of its financial and narrative reports on time, but had no means of sanctioning a NNGO that is routinely late in the disbursement of funds which might then harm the SNGOs reputation and standing within the communities it works with. A far more serious situation is when funding, despite what may be stated in an agreement, is stopped mid-way through a programme without any explanation or preparation. This has been experienced by about 35% of Rwandan NGOs who took part in the survey. The above examples illustrate the relative powerlessness of SNGOs as regards agreements and MOUs. They may assist in clarifying exactly what the roles of the organisations involved in a partnership may be as regards the implementation of a project, but the SNGO is relatively powerless and is unable to sanction a NNGO that fails to implement part of an MOU or agreement. This means that for a SNGO, the signing of an agreement or MOU is largely symbolic and as illustrated above, other factors may be more significant in determining whether or not a relationship is one where both voices are heard or not.

- *The extent to which NNGOs are open to requests for information*

In Rwanda, the most significant issue as regards information was the fact that it tended to move from the South to the North. This was exacerbated by the fact that in some cases a Rwandan NGO had to submit the same information time and time again. Nearly all organisations surveyed stated that they did not often receive feedback as regards the reports that they had submitted, and it was generally extremely difficult to get any kind of information from Northern partners. Despite this, one interviewee was very positive as regards the creation of thematic networks (HIV/AIDS, agriculture, income generation, etc) involving both sets of NGOs, to which many NNGOs had made significant contributions. These networks were seen as alternative sources of information on development practice and an opportunity for sharing experiences in a rather more egalitarian environment, although many of these networks tend to stop functioning when funding from the North is no longer available.

Findings from the research carried out in Rwanda concur with the initial research premise put forward by Transform, that NNGOs do not listen or involve their Southern partners enough in general development practice despite rhetoric to the contrary. It was revealing to note that when referring to Northern partners, most Rwandan NGO personnel tended to use the word 'funder' or 'donor' as opposed to 'partner'.

From the Rwandan perspective, there have not been any major or fundamental changes in the structures upholding the relationships between Southern and Northern NGOs since Transform was involved in producing the Harare Declaration in 1998. The view from

Rwandan NGOs as regards their relationships with NNGOs often contrasts completely with the views emanating from those UK NGOs that have also participated in the project. There, the opinion is generally that there are some inequalities and that they (UK NNGOs) are trying their best to mitigate them, and that SNGO opinions do feed into the creation of mainstream development policy and practice. How then, do we work around these very different perceptions of reality?

#### **4.4 Tanzania research findings**

A total of 32 different local NGOs were included in the Tanzanian survey. Both primary and secondary data were collected. Primary data collection was done by semi-structured interviews using both open and closed ended questionnaires, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), participant observation and informal discussion with key informants. Secondary data was collected by reviewing relevant documents. The gathered information was summarised and analysed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) computer programme. A frequency sub-programme was used in data analysis.

Those Tanzanian SNGOs that participated in the research saw little evidence that NNGOs wished to consult them about changes in Northern policy, and there were no significant findings recorded in this area. From the extensive description and analysis provided in the country report by CASEC on the Tanzanian situation, the following are the key points relating to main research themes:

- *Most Tanzanian NGOs are supported financially by NNGOs* - 94% of the Tanzanian SNGO sample were funded, with 25% being supported by a single NNGO, 31% by two, and 38% by more than two.
- *Working agreements between NNGOs and SNGOs* - Agreements were either formal in a sense that they may be documented and approved legally, or were informal ones. Only 2 (6%) of respondents interviewed said that their organisation had no formal agreement (contract) with the Northern partner. The majority of the respondents (94%) stated that contracts which are signed between them and their Northern partners were very important, because they guide both NNGOs and SNGOs. They said that contracts show clear roles and responsibilities of each partner, as well as other terms of partnership between the two. Some of them said that, if contracts are well prepared, they can create good systems of accountability and transparency between the partners.
- *Who prepares the contracts between NNGOs and SNGOs* - In 44% of cases this was done by the NNGO, and in 56% of cases it was done in collaboration between SNGOs and NNGOs.
- *Who is more favoured by the contracts between NNGOs and SNGOs* - In the opinion of the latter, 56% considered that the NNGO was more favoured, while 44% considered both were favoured equally.
- *The roles and responsibilities indicated for SNGOs* - 94% of respondents interviewed said that the roles and responsibilities of SNGOs are normally clearly shown in the contracts.
- *The roles and responsibilities indicated for NNGOs* - 75% of respondents said that the responsibilities of NNGOs were elaborated in the contracts. Some of the roles that were

mentioned to be fulfilled by NNGOs to SNGOs were enhancing Southern NGOs in implementing effectively their programs, and providing technical and financial support. The remaining 25% said that in most cases the roles and responsibilities of NNGOs were not clearly understood by SNGOs, or even not shown at all in the contracts. Most of the roles and responsibilities of NNGOs shown in the contracts gave NNGOs power of controlling their Southern partners.

- *Languages used in the contracts between NNGO and SNGO* - Foreign languages, particularly English, were used in preparing contracts or MOUs. Amongst those surveyed, there was no agreement written in Kiswahili, the Tanzanian national language. Is it fair to use a foreign language for contracts that are signed for the benefit of poor communities who cannot understand the language? The respondents said that it would be good if the community understood what had been written in the contracts signed between NNGO and SNGO on their behalf.
- *What happens when SNGOs break some of the agreed terms of the contracts* - 56% of respondents said that donors (referring to NNGOs) were likely to stop their support to SNGOs completely as soon as they discovered that the SNGOs had gone against the terms of contract. 37% said that NNGO normally stopped supporting SNGO only temporarily, and would rather discuss and once a compromise was reached would resume the assistance. Only 6% said that there were no strong actions taken against the SNGO when they did not adhere to the agreed terms in the contracts. Instead, other means were adopted to solve the problem, for example, reviewing the contract; preparing another contract to take into consideration the interests of both parties, or other solutions of that nature.
- *What happens when NNGOs break some of the agreed terms of the contract* - 44% of respondents said that usually there was no strong action taken when NNGOs went against the agreed conditions of the contract. 25% said that, if a NNGO went against the agreement, normally quick solutions would be initiated by the NNGO to solve the problem, trying to cover the weaknesses of the NNGO, where possible coming up with a picture painting a bad image of the SNGO. Another 19% reported that the contract simply terminated, even if it was the NNGO that went against the terms of the contract, disregarding all attempts by the SNGO in maintaining the contract. Only 12% said that the SNGO could stop the contract with the NNGO when the NNGO failed to act according to the agreement. All this implies that the one who gives will have more influence and power over the one who normally receives.
- *Procedures for terminating a contract* - During this study it was found that 81% respondents said that most of the contracts signed between NNGOs and SNGOs explained when and how the contracts would be terminated, but 19% said this was not the case.
- *People's general views on the contracts between NNGOs and SNGOs* - In interviews focused on people who were involved in development issues related to partnership and contracts between SNGOs and NNGOs, 63% said there was unequal involvement between NNGOs and SNGOs during preparation of contracts. Many of the ideas presented by SNGOs were ignored by NNGOs, and they felt that the process had an imbalanced representation of ideas and interests between the SNGOs and NNGOs. At the end SNGOs were more likely to be at a disadvantaged position. 13% said that the

contracts signed between NNGOs and SNGOs to a large extent did not involve participation of the targeted groups. They felt that most of the contracts were based on the particular agreement fashion or donor environment for that given time. For example if the priorities of that time were on population or gender, the proposals and contracts will also be based on those priorities. Therefore it is likely that SNGOs and NNGOs will be writing up proposals and agreements that respond to the latest fad. Under such situations, target groups are not a priority and are not given access as beneficiaries to see the contracts. 12% believed that contracts between NNGOs and SNGOs did not really consider the socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects of the targeted communities. They saw that there was lack of proper pre-studies in the project areas by both NNGOs and SNGOs. Lack of pre-studies could result in ignorance of some important aspects of the cultural, economic or social realities of communities in the project areas, hence leading to development resistance. The remaining 12% said that many people saw the nature of partnership between NNGOs and SNGOs mainly being based on the financial flow from the NNGOs to the SNGOs, and non-financial support was rarely considered by either. They further saw that contracts were usually explaining how the SNGOs were being supported by NNGOs and very rarely explained how NNGOs would be supported by SNGOs.

- *Information that SNGOs provide to NNGOs* - SNGOs provide information to NNGOs such as progress reports, organisation's policies and structures, strategies, plans, financial and audit reports. Other information that SNGOs provide to NNGOs include profiles of project areas, current political and economic situations in project areas, beneficiaries of the projects, methodologies and approaches that will be used during the implementation of projects, costs and much other information of that nature. Sometimes they were required to provide to donors their other sources of funding, live stories related to the project, and information for advocacy work in the north.
- *Information provided by NNGOs to SNGOs* - NNGOs may provide information to SNGOs such as their strategies, policies, and kinds of assistance they are going to provide to the SNGO, communities or implementing agents. Some NNGOs provide information to their SNGO partners about their experiences in various fields, particularly those where they were more successful. They have also provided the results of assessment, evaluation or auditing exercises that had been carried out as required or directed by NNGO/donors or by other agents working on their behalf. However, some of the respondents interviewed said that some NNGOs did not send such feedback, although they agreed that it was a right for SNGOs to demand them. Respondents felt that this sounded good in theory, but most NNGOs rarely put it into practice.
- *Kinds of Information that SNGOs would like to get from the NNGOs* - When asked what kind of information SNGOs would like to be given by NNGOs, a majority of the respondents (81%) said that SNGOs needed to be informed on the policies, strategies and approaches used by their NNGO counterparts. The remaining respondents (19%) mentioned other information such as feedback on the assessment, evaluation or auditing of their organisation (SNGO), taking into consideration that this is part and parcel of the terms of agreement or contract and is carried out under the instructions of NNGOs. Other information that SNGOs would like to get from NNGOs included information on MOUs or contracts, terms of references, their various experiences, their source of income and the conditions related to their sources of funds. SNGOs would also like to know how the information provided by them to NNGOs is used by NNGOs.

- *Respondents' views concerning information sharing between NNGOs and SNGOs* - 25% of SNGO respondents said that they doubted if the information which was provided by the SNGOs to the NNGOs really benefited the SNGOs and communities in the South. They felt that such information benefited NNGOs by giving them credibility to their governments and their communities in general. Information from the South helped NNGOs during fundraising, but they doubted that all the money raised for assistance reached the targeted groups in the South. 44% of the respondents said that there was imbalance in terms of information sharing between NNGOs and SNGOs. It was the SNGOs that usually provided more crucial information to NNGOs than the NNGOs gave to SNGOs. One respondent stated that SNGOs did not understand the purpose of all the information demanded by NNGOs, because there was little information coming to them from the North. It was common for a NNGO to be very knowledgeable about its Southern partner while the SNGO had very little information about its partner in the North. The remaining 31% doubted if most of the information provided by both NNGOs and SNGOs had been researched before being released. It often did not give a clear picture of the situation, the particular Southern organisation or the project area. Most of the information under-estimated, over-estimated or even exaggerated the situation.

#### **4.5 Zimbabwe Research Findings**

The Zimbabwe research approach was further developed in the light of the Tanzania experience, and cast its net slightly more widely (covering issues relating to the disbursement of funds and organisational sustainability, in response to the priority concerns of local NGOs). In terms of the core research themes it came up with the following main findings:

- *How do you rate the level of SNGO involvement in the process of a donor's major shifts in policy?* - 90% of SNGOs thought they had no influence in this process, while 10% thought they might have some influence. None believed there had ever been any representatives of partners on their donor's board or any other NNGO decision making body. There was a general view that SNGOs should be greatly involved in the process if a donor wants to change their policy.
- *What are the systems or processes that would increase the level and quality of partner consultation in macro decision making?* - there should be continuous information sharing, not just intervention when there is a problem. This should include joint visiting of project sites. NNGOs and SNGOs should genuinely be cooperating partners, where NNGOs are the supporting/funding partners and SNGOs are the implementing partners. SNGO directors and policy-makers should give input to NNGOs and their policy-making teams.
- *What is the main purpose of having a contract between NNGO and SNGO?* - both parties have to agree on certain issues and fulfil them; mutual understanding ensures commitment and binding responsibilities.
- *Do your donors generally use a standard contract with its partners?* - most contracts are donor driven, standardised and in most cases not participatory.
- *Can you outline the process which leads to the eventual signing of a contract between NNGO and SNGO?* - the proposal is submitted by the SNGO; the NNGO then sends out

a copy to elaborate who does what, when and how (Memorandum of Understanding) and then the funding agreement follows. SNGO involvement is minimal.

- *What information do NNGOs require from SNGOs?* - Such information regularly includes mission and vision statements, organisational policies (e.g. human resources, vehicle, HIV/AIDS, asset disposal, etc.), project proposal development and reporting formats, record of assets, composition and qualifications of Board members, other donors funding the organisation, beneficiaries / target group, location, organisational capacity and decision-making process / structures.
- *What organisational information do your donors routinely pass to you?* - This is usually limited to policy statements, reporting formats and times, financial guidelines and funding period information.
- *A SNGO practitioner once described NNGOs as a “secretive lot”: would you agree with this statement?* - 90% agreed and stated that this feeling creates suspicions on both sides, i.e. NNGOs do not feel trusted and SNGOs suspect a hidden agenda. Relationships may become sour or even be cut.
- *Do your donors share with you information about their board, fundraising strategies or organisational structure?* - 75% did not share such information. Asked to rate their satisfaction with the level of information provided by the NNGOs with whom they were in partnership, 70% of SNGOs said the provision of information by their donors was poor, and the other 30% rated it as only fair.
- *Do NNGO partners disburse funds on time?* - 80% of respondents said disbursements were normally late, leading to a loss of community confidence and even a lapse in activities if the SNGO has only one donor.

From the above it is evident that there exists an unequal relationship between SNGOs and NNGOs, which needs to be tackled. After production of the final report, there must be an implementation phase of solving major issues emanating from the findings.

#### **4.6 UK research findings**

In the UK, 16 international development organisations made inputs to the study. All had partners in Africa. The majority could be described as single-issue NNGOs although some worked in a variety of development areas. The key points that came out of their contributions were as follows:

- *The changing environment for British-based NNGOs* - there is increased competition in accessing funding from all sources, official, private and from the public. This is perhaps especially true for the medium sized and small NGOs. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that many of the larger SNGOs are now able to access funds from official bodies such as DFID, without the use of an NNGO intermediary.
- *The changing nature of development work itself* - there is a strong desire or push to ‘professionalize’ the sector, e.g. by the use of tools such as the log frame, which means that the sector has become more technical. Again, more and more organisations feel

under pressure to move away from service provision and to engage in advocacy. This also impinges on the relationships that NNGOs have with their Southern partners.

- *Many NNGOs feel that they need to engage in 'capacity building'* - this entails the transferring the skills to their Southern partners. In theory it is required so that 'local people are involved in their own development'.
- *Decentralization* - a new operational style has become a key strategic issue for many NNGOs, absorbing a lot of their effort.
- *The need for new relationships with the South* - a tacit acknowledgement on the part of those interviewed about the desirability of having more equitable and transparent relationships with their Southern partners, but a lack of clarity as to how to go about developing it.
- *Differences in how organisations view the issue of 'partnership'* - for example, some organisations have produced strategic documents on how to manage partnerships and how this fits with their long-term strategies, whereas some organisations do not really have a policy on how to work with Southern organisations.
- *The importance of trust* - a prerequisite for creating good and productive partnerships between SNGOs and their Northern partners, but something that cannot suddenly be generated out of thin air.

#### 4.7 Overall results analysis

Each of the separate country reports reached its own semi-autonomous findings, but these may be analysed and presented under the three common themes underlying the enquiry as a whole. In this section a series of quotations have been extracted from an overview paper prepared by Alfred Sakafu, a key Transform Network member and someone who has also worked for an NNGO over many years in developing North-South NGO partnerships. His overall perception is of a highly unsatisfactory context:

"It is difficult for NNGOs to escape the historical blame that they are still part and parcel of the political and economic colonisation of Third World countries. It is obvious that so long as they are getting big funding from their Governments, they will not escape the blame. Funding is the main problem for both NNGOs and SNGOs. In order to survive as institutions, they have to get funding from somewhere else. In most countries, the law does not allow them to carry out commercial ventures. Their begging position disempowers them in terms of decision-making and self-determination. That is why when funding policies of Northern Governments change, the policies of NNGOs also change."

Conclusions drawn from these findings are in the next Chapter 5, with overall recommendations grouped in the following Chapter 6.

- *The extent to which NNGOs consult with their partners on major policy changes*

The earlier part of this chapter has presented the overwhelmingly negative feelings that SNGOs have on this subject. Set against this is the evidence gathered from interviews with a sample of NNGO staff.

In general, NNGO practitioners felt that their Southern partners have a significant influence in the way that their organisation work, and that the organisation's priorities and practice were informed by the experiences of their partners on the ground or in the field. However, when pressed as to how this might manifest itself in practice, there were a variety of responses. In most cases, it was said that this happened in an informal or ad hoc manner. Contact with Southern partners during the day-to-day management of programmes or projects was the main way in which partners informed the development practice or priorities of the NNGO. As one practitioner stated, *'Speaking and listening to partners should be organic and should happen as you interact in the pursuance of your work. Therefore, even if there are no formal consultative processes per se, NNGO staff directly involved with partners should have an idea as to what they think or believe'*.

Visits to partners were also seen as an opportunity not only to learn about the progress of a particular project or programme but as an opportunity to learn about the wider context in which the SNGO was operating. A number of NNGOs (60%) had arenas in which they would meet collectively with their partners to discuss the major strategic issues. This tended to be a process in which all partners or some partners were invited and asked to make an input, which would then inform the NNGO's agenda for the next couple of years. Many NNGOs felt that they had to 'direct' or 'steer' these discussions. The justification given for this tendency was the need to come up coherently with a strategy, that would meet as far as was possible the aspirations of the various partners whose priorities were not always matched. This situation was further complicated by the fact that the Southern partners worked in vastly different political and economic environments. Therefore, one of the roles of the NNGO was to identify, highlight and then manage the issues that were emerging as a priority for all of their partners. This meant that at times, certain partners might not have their needs met.

A slightly modified version of the above process used by NNGOs is to send out questionnaires which are then filled in by the Southern partners. This happens in a number of ways – one organisation uses this system to examine performance vis-a-vis how efficient it is at sending goods that are required by its partners so as to enable them to carry out their work with communities. This questionnaire or survey is not really about asking Southern partners' opinions as to what direction they think their Northern partner should take. It is more about performance and efficiency on a number of agreed objectives. Nevertheless, there are NNGOs that felt it could be adapted and used as a way of measuring their performance in partnership and as a tool for analysing and evaluating partner opinion on a number of issues. One organisation takes this further and uses the questionnaire not only to gauge opinion amongst its Southern partners but includes all stakeholders including the British public who provide it with a substantial percentage of its income. However, the use of questionnaires does have its drawbacks. For example, one organisation reported that it had not received a very positive response from partners regarding the questionnaire it had sent out. It seems that there had not been any attempts made to find out why this situation had occurred from the partners themselves.

All NNGOs were asked whether or not they had any partner representation on their board of management, and whether this issue was seen as being strategically important. In most cases the answer was 'no'. There were many varied reasons given for this, such as it was '*not really something we have thought about*', or '*we work with rural communities and it simply would not be appropriate to bring them here to sit on our boards as that concept is alien to them*'. Another reason provided by one organisation for not having partners on the board was the fact that '*board membership tended to be drawn from a certain group of people who knew each other or the founder of that particular organisation - 'the great and the good'*' as the interviewee put it. Yet another organisation stated that the priority as far as board membership was concerned in the past, tended to be strategic - '*board members were selected on the basis as to what they could bring to the organisation in terms of raising funds or publicity*'. The major constraint given by the vast majority of those spoken to (80%) as to the lack of partner or Southern involvement on their boards was simply that '*the funds are not there*'. Organisations would welcome partner involvement on their boards where UK charity law allowed it, but bringing partners to the UK and meeting their costs whilst they were there, was simply a cost that most of the organisations could not meet given the tight budgets under which they were working. One organisation had experimented with having partners on its board when it had acquired funding for that particular purpose over a three-year period and was pleased with the outcomes. But when funding for the experiment was no longer available, the organisation was not able to continue with partner involvement on its board - a situation it regretted deeply. Another organisation tried to work around this seemingly perennial constraint by inviting partners to attend board meetings if they were being held at the same time that they (the partners) happened to be visiting the UK on other matters. If a meeting was not to take place at such a time, informal meetings with board members might then be arranged. One organisation felt that it was more important and cost effective to involve UK residents with links to the countries in which it operated, than to have partners on its board.

Two organisations viewed Southern partner involvement in their decision-making processes as so important that they felt that it imperative for them to ensure that it occurred. To reduce costs, one organisation held a major board meeting only once a year as opposed to three or four as is normally the case. Attempts were made to have further board meetings 'piggy back' on other major occasions involving several of their partners. But Alfred Sakafu's considered view from the South is different:

"NNGOs insist that their relationship with SNGOs is in a form of partnership. It means that they have shared development vision, goals and objectives and each has something valuable to contribute towards development ventures. Therefore, being partners they have to respect and value each other. But when NNGOs and SNGOs collaborate, they tend to have different perceptions. It is easy to note the true feelings of each collaborator through communications, relationships, agenda demands. Usually NNGOs feel that they have the financial power and are knowledgeable; therefore they have the expertise on development issues, and are the masters of the relationship. On the other side, SNGOs display the feelings that they are poor, ignorant. It is therefore right for them to expect donor support financially and technically. In the end, both develop a concept that the South has nothing to offer towards its own development and that, for any effective development to take place in the South, it has to depend on resources from the North."

- *The manner in which agreements or Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) are made*

As in the case of consultation processes described above, the critical comments of SNGOs that were gathered during research enquiries in the South contrast with more positive perceptions that were recorded in the North.

NNGO participants were asked what role they thought agreements and MOUs played in their relationships with their Southern partners. They were also asked to state what the agreements and MOUs used in their organisations contained. In addition, they were asked to provide a brief summary of the processes which led to the signing of agreements between their organisation and their Southern partners.

Nearly all interviewees (85%) stated that, for the most part, agreements were required by back-donors as instruments of accountability. In nearly all cases, the NNGO was required to sign agreements with the organisations providing the funding to them, and were therefore compelled to pass on this requirement to their Southern partners. For NNGOs, the issue of accountability was very important regardless of where they obtained their funds from - the general public, official sources, private trusts, etc - because it had a direct effect on the organisation's ability to fundraise in the future.

How the agreements were used in practice tended to differ amongst and within the organisations interviewed. Some personnel (25%) stated that for them agreements were merely a bureaucratic necessity that did not really impinge on the future development of a partnership. What tended to be more pertinent to the success of a partnership was whether or not there was a match as regards the values of the two organisations involved. Another important factor in the management of partnerships was the level of trust that had been built up by the personnel who were involved on both sides in the day-to-day interactions of a particular partnership. This trust was not something that could be '*captured on a piece of paper*' as one interviewee put it. A word of caution needs to be made at this point. The interviewee concerned stated that that they were describing how partnerships under their remit were managed, and were not speaking on behalf of the whole organisation as it did not at that time have an organisational ethos or practice as regards with partner organisations. This situation can be looked at in both a negative and a positive light. The positive argument would claim that the organisation allows programme officers the flexibility to be able to adapt to the particular situation they may find themselves in with partners. The negative argument would state that there does not seem to have been an attempt to create a clear and shared organisational culture as regards partnerships in general. This might adversely affect relationships with Southern partners, especially if there is a lot of personnel movement inside and out of the NNGO.

About 40% of respondents felt that agreements were important in that they outlined clearly the standards that each side was expected to meet. Commonly, agreements stated how long a project would last, how much money was involved and the reporting requirements on the part of the NNGO or the SNGO involved. In addition, some agreements clearly stated how project visits would be conducted and how often, as well as any other information relating to that particular project as regards monitoring and evaluation. It could be argued therefore that agreements were an extremely useful tool of clearly stating the expectations from both sides, as well as for marking out boundaries. This seems to gain in importance especially when embarking on a new working relationship or partnership. Therefore one organisation felt that it only really needed to use the agreements as a reference point in the

management of partnerships when it was working with new partner organisations, rather than those with whom it had had long-established and mutually beneficial partnerships.

On the subject of the process that led to the signing of agreements, roughly 60% of NNGOs claimed that it was negotiated. The typical scenario painted was one in which both parties had an equal opportunity to amend the document before it finally became binding. For many, this was a welcome feature of how many proposals were actually written. It was claimed that most funding proposals are now jointly written by the NNGO and its Southern partner. In many cases, by the time it came to the signing of an agreement, both parties had a clear understanding as to what their particular role would be in the implementation of the said programme or project. For this reason, most of those interviewed in NNGOs felt that the Southern organisation signing up to an agreement or MOU had a clear understanding of what was contained in the document. One NNGO had a policy which sought to ensure that communities to be served by the Southern partner also had a clear understanding of what was contained in the agreement, to ensure ownership at all levels as well as to create a tool for accountability.

A number of NNGOs were looking at ways in which agreements could be drawn up which would tip the balance more in favour of the Southern partner as regards the NNGO's obligations. Nonetheless, there was an acknowledgement that there were not many options available to a SNGO to sanction a NNGO should it fail to fulfil its side of an agreement.

No organisation interviewed had signed an agreement that was drawn up by a Southern partner, though some had had the experience of a SNGO refusing to sign an agreement because it was not fully satisfied as to what it contained.

Some organisations used standard agreements that were signed by all Southern partners with whom they were in partnership. One justification for this was that it ensured equity, and that all partners had a similar working relationship with the NNGO concerned. Another argument in favour of this practice was that, administratively, it was far more efficient to have a standardised agreement which was well known by all concerned and precluded the need to engage in lengthy discussions as to the detail contained in such documents.

Most of the documents were written in English, or in Spanish in the case of South America. Some organisations (30%) had made a concerted effort to ensure that the documents were not written in too legalistic a language. On the other hand, Alfred Sakafu had this to say:

"Memoranda of Understanding are always prepared by NNGOs in a northern legal language which protects the interest of NNGOs. In fact, they are prepared on the same principles as those prepared by the so-called explorers who forced African chiefs to sign agreements prepared in a foreign language they did not understand. Recently, some NNGOs have come up with a new approach. They contract consultants to prepare partnership contracts between them and their partners, and sometimes all concerned parties are involved in preparing them. The drafts are then taken by the NNGO and are modified to suit their interests, so that the final version is different from the original. SNGOs are expected not to question the contents and implications of the contracts. If they do so, they are at a risk; the aid can easily be withdrawn and given to another organisation which is ready to sign without questioning."

- *The extent to which NNGOs are open to requests for information*

NNGOs were asked whether they thought there was an equal exchange of information between Northern and Southern NGOs. Interviewees were invited to comment about the types of information they required from partners, and what information they routinely provided to partners about their own organisations. There tended to be some confusion as to what constituted 'exchange of information'

The vast majority of those interviewed stated that they were open to requests for information from their partners and did not envisage a situation in which they would not provide the information asked for. One interviewee stated that the partners that they worked with did not ask questions about who was on the NNGO's board, nor did they require any detailed analysis of the working environment for NNGOs in the UK. One interviewee acknowledged there were some instances in which NNGO practitioners withheld information from their Southern partners such as the percentage of a grant that would be kept for administrative purposes by the NNGO. The interviewee was keen to stress that this did not happen in the organisation s/he worked in. For another organisation, this was not an issue because they had a standard percentage (7%) which they took from a grant to cover administrative costs.

Most NNGO informants felt that, in order to work effectively and in an atmosphere of transparency with their partners, they had to be prepared to provide the same information to their partners as they in turn may require from them. Even so, most (70%) claimed that their partners did not routinely require information as to gender balance within the NNGO, funding sources, etc. Instead, the information most required by partners tended to be about where to access training and capacity building, reporting requirements and proposal writing, as well as advice on information technology.

When discussing the information that they routinely required from partners, some 50% of those questioned claimed that the information was used either to report back to back-donors or to fundraise - very often on behalf of the SNGO in question. Some of the information gathered from SNGOs formed an integral part of NNGO advocacy and development education work. And yet there were strong misgivings in the South about the extent to which there is adequate mutual knowledge between partners. As Alfred Sakafu puts it:

"Tracing the relationship, there is a general impression that both SNGOs and NNGOs do not know each other well. In reality, each is not conversant with the working environment of the other because they are not transparent. Therefore, no one has the true picture of the other partner.

Most SNGOs do not understand the circumstances under which NNGOs work. They do not know the culture of the people who support their partners in the North, and the conditionalities that are given to them by their donors. That is why, when NNGOs behave in certain ways, SNGOs complain. At the same time, NNGOs do not understand the circumstances through which SNGOs operate. For example, they do not understand the demands that SNGOs get from communities, their governments and the reasons behind those demands. They do not know the nature of links that exists between them and their governments. A relationship grows like any living creature. It has to be nursed and should be given time and space to grow."

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The following wording is also to be found in the Executive summary at the beginning of this document.

### 5.1 Diverse perceptions

In general terms, the responses from NNGOs in the UK and from SNGOs in Rwanda, Tanzania and Zimbabwe suggest that there is a wide gulf in perceptions as to the experience and health of development partnerships between SNGOs on one hand and NNGOs on the other. What appears to be the same process is experienced and remembered by the different partners in very different ways. Two key examples of this are:

- The process by which the NNGO consults with its Southern partner, and the NNGO staff member sees the process as consultative and participatory, whereas the SNGO staff member views the process as one in which they are politely but firmly told there is a new Northern way of doing things, and thereby what is expected from them.
- Joint writing of proposals, which many NNGO staff view as one of the ways in which the fact that they work collaboratively with SNGOs can be demonstrated. The little subsequent changes that the NNGO may make prior to the submission of the proposal are only to increase the chances of that proposal being successful, especially given the current competitive climate. But, for many in SNGOs, the 'little' changes are an opportunity for the NNGO to re-direct the proposal so that what eventually gets funded bears hardly any relationship to the proposal initially conceptualised by the SNGO.

### 5.2 Honest disagreements

Many SNGO personnel felt that the relationships they had with their donors were not truly 'adult to adult' but more like 'adult to teenager or young adult' as one workshop participant put it. This was made the more obvious by the fact that many seemed to be resigned to the current modus operandi due to the fact that alternative sources of funding were not currently available. Many were also critical of the lack of co-ordination that they observed amongst NNGOs, which to some was indicative of the fact that many NNGOs had little local knowledge and were more interested in furthering the interest of their own NGO rather than tackling development holistically.

NNGO administrative capacities also came in for criticism, as many SNGO members complained about the lack of organisational memory, feedback, and the late disbursement of funds which had such a profound effect on programme delivery and effectiveness.

It was found that SNGOs provided information to NNGOs such as progress reports, organisational policies and structures, strategies, plans, financial and auditing reports. However, provision of information by SNGOs to NNGOs was determined by the kind of relationship that the two partners had; for example how close they were. They also mentioned other information such as organisations' policies, strategies, long- and short-term plans as mostly demanded by NNGOs from the SNGOs during the early stages of partnership. Other information that SNGOs usually provide to NNGOs includes profiles of the project areas, current political and economic situation of the project areas, beneficiaries of the projects, methodologies and approaches that will be used during the implementation

of projects, costs and other information of that nature. Sometimes they were required to provide donors with information on their other sources of funding, live stories related for the project, and information for advocacy work in the North.

There was a feeling in the South that NNGOs do not listen to or involve their Southern partners enough in general development practice, despite rhetoric to the contrary. When referring to Northern partners, many SNGO personnel tended to use the word 'funder' or 'donor' as opposed to 'partner'. This suggests that there have not been any major or fundamental changes in the structures upholding the relationships between Southern and Northern NGOs since Transform was involved in producing the Harare Declaration in 1998.

For their part, most SNGO staff believed that NNGOs feel they are doing the best they can, especially given the current funding environment, which is at best uncertain. This is especially true for the medium and small organisations who may not be household names and who face stiff competition from within their home country (UK). Coupled with the fact that many of the major organisations are funding SNGOs directly, the situation according to the smaller NNGOs becomes doubly tenuous. This crisis in funding is further compounded by the fact that they have to deal with 'aid fatigue' amongst the UK public, which is increasingly wondering what exactly happens to the money it donates for the 'alleviation of poverty'.

The view from many SNGOs as regards their relationships with NNGOs is often the opposite of the views emanating from UK NGOs that have also participated in the project. There the opinion is generally that there are some inequalities, but that they (UK NNGOs) are trying their best to mitigate them, and that SNGO opinions do feed into the creation of mainstream development policy and practice.

NNGO staff appear to see themselves as having to play a balancing act, as regards the expectations from the Southern organisations that they work with on one hand and the funders on the other. 'They think that we have a lot of money', is one refrain that was often repeated as regards the Southern partners, and 'we have to work really hard in order to get funding'. So for some, any criticism of the way NNGOs work with Southern partners is a real blow. This is further exacerbated by the fact that the nature of 'development work' has changed, in that it has become more 'technical'. This fact puts limits on the time that an organisation or an individual within an organisation is able to invest in the human contacts that are an essential component of building good, long-standing, and mutually beneficial partnerships. These changes may not be fully understood or accepted by the Southern partners, which may increase the chances of a relationship turning sour.

For many NNGO staff, there are not many places for them to go for impartial advice should a relationship deteriorate. This lack of support is often made worse by the desire to be seen as being fair to the Southern partners. Close to 75% of those interviewed in NNGOs felt that it was refreshing to be able to discuss partnership issues away from the hustle and bustle of the demands of being a programme officer. Whilst many organisations try very hard to work in partnership, the issues relating to such relationships (be they related to power, race, agenda setting, or advocacy on behalf of the poor) tend to be overlooked in the day-to-day management of the development process. This leads to the situation found in many organisations, where board members have little contact with partner organisations and where 'partnership' is rarely discussed within board meetings.

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

*The wording of paragraph 6.1 is also to be found in the Executive summary at the beginning of this document.*

Those in Africa who took part in the survey were asked if they had any recommendations on how to help NNGOs listen more to SNGOs. Some of their responses were of a general nature, while others can be divided between suggestions that would enable the SNGOs to strengthen their own positions in partnerships, and suggestions for change and action on the part of NNGOs. Key responses are listed below:

### 6.1 General recommendations:

- NNGOs and SNGOs should work together to come up with different funding systems or formulas. If the way that NNGOs work with Southern organisations is heavily influenced by back donors, then NNGOs can perhaps collectively come up with formulas of funding that are less top down and more flexible. Alternatively, SNGOs should fight for more direct funding from back donors.
- The scope of partnerships needs to be broadened to include more than just the funding relationship.
- There is need for much more dialogue between the SNGOs and their northern counterparts to improve understanding of each other's working environments.
- There is need for regulating standards to govern the conduct of both Northern and Southern NGOs (similar to those applying to accountants and lawyers).
- Local umbrella organisations ought to be more involved in round-table discussions between SNGOs and their donors.
- Senior personnel from both NNGOs and SNGOs should be required to work or go on sabbaticals with a partner organisation, so that they are better able to understand the day to day realities that that organisation faces.
- Both NNGOs and SNGOs need to include beneficiaries and community groups in various processes, e.g. project preparation, agreements, information sharing, because their existence is the reason behind the existence of partnerships. Beneficiaries can provide important inputs and feedback to NGOs and others.
- NNGOs should use their comparative advantage of easy knowledge access to pass information to their partners in the South. On the other hand, SNGOs should use their easy access to local knowledge and experiences and pass it to their partners in the North. Both need to assess the level of information exchange, and create systems of reporting and accounting that are bi-directional

### For NNGOs:

- Systems and processes that allow Southern partners to contribute to NNGO strategy and policy should be put into place. One example would be fact-finding visits by senior NNGO personnel, whereby they would listen to their Southern partners and be asked to account in respect of their organisation's performance.
- More NNGO field offices should be opened, and where possible staffed by local personnel with a better understanding of local culture, language and needs.

- NNGOs should try and ensure that their governing bodies are inclusive and are not drawn from a narrow social group. Where finances and the law allow it, they should endeavour to have Southern representation on their boards.
- Contracts should be jointly written and binding on both sides, and funds ought to be disbursed on time. Agreements should be written in a clear and concise manner, and where possible and appropriate in the local language.
- NNGOs should play a significant role in collaborating with SNGOs to lobby big financial institutions such as World Bank, bilateral organisations and other government bodies. The process should include capacity building skills for SNGOs by NNGOs, especially focusing on advocacy and lobbying work.
- NNGOs should listen more to their partners in the South. They need to recognise and respect SNGOs as real partners, valuing their work and experiences and sharing the decision-making processes. The relationship should be based on mutual respect and collaboration as equal partners, taking into consideration that each has a key role to play in the overall development process worldwide. Both NNGOs and SNGOs should work hard towards establishing a balanced partnership which would enable effective contributions from both sides in addressing social, economic, and political issues affecting poor people in developing countries.
- NNGOs should debate issues relating to partnership on a regular basis both within their organisations and as a collective body through the auspices of organisations such as BOND (British NGOs for Development). Where it is not possible to have input from all partners, they should establish reference bodies of Southern partners who may be called upon to comment on policy and strategy.

**For SNGOs:**

- SNGOs need to be clear and build confidence in their mandate, vision, mission and values. NNGOs must recognise the legitimacy and autonomy of SNGOs.
- SNGOs should create more strategies and efforts in order to reduce dependency on NNGOs. This would reduce the control of NNGOs over SNGOs, or a parent-child type of relationship.

Although use of the term 'partnership' will continue to be highly admired and emphasised by both Northern and Southern development organisations, particularly those in the North, no one needs go deep to determine whether NNGOs and SNGOs have a real partnership or not. In general, true partnership between NNGOs and SNGOs has a long way to go to become a reality. Though there are some positive examples of true partnership between NNGOs and SNGOs, there are still many problems to address to improve the current situation. Common weaknesses that can easily be pointed out in such kind of 'partnership' include the inequality of resources, lack of transparency, imbalances of information sharing, control of one partner over the other, and contracts or agreements which favour the interests of one partner more than the other. Therefore, more radical changes are needed in order to build the move towards effective, balanced partnership. However, this will only work when both North and South, particularly NNGOs, are willing to go for radical and 'transformative' change. This is to say that, there is a need for NNGOs to start a process of re-learning and critically examining their roles and responsibilities in terms of their relationship with Southern partners in order to make the necessary changes.

## 6.2 Renewed efforts, new directions

This research work (and the reports that have come out of it) is only a small step on a long road, but hopefully they will prove a useful and a challenging contribution for future progress.

Some of the SNGO comments that have been gathered through this research may seem harsh and hurtful to several NNGOs. Nevertheless, even if the criticisms may be inappropriate or even unfair in certain contexts, their existence is an important factor that affects everyone. In other environments, specific examples or experiences can have a general effect that is wider than that of the original event. For instance, politicians and clergy, bureaucrats and police have to operate within a climate where each group is affected by both the good performance and the poor performance of others, and by the various interpretations that are put on these diverse experiences. The same processes apply to the world of North-South development partnerships, where the diverse feelings experienced within a particular partnership are subject to influences and interpretations far beyond what has or has not happened within that particular relationship.

Every NGO in both South and North has its own authentic experience of the strengths and weaknesses of partnerships, the achievements and the disappointments, the trust that was deserved and the trust that was misplaced, the joys and the pain. All this is the raw material for everyone's reflection and learning, for sharing and exploration, for reinforcement and realignment, for renewed commitment to the long haul of creating and maintaining genuine partnerships.

Clearly, much academic research into the processes and experiences of partnership has already been done, many arguments have been committed to paper, much talking has taken place face-to-face, and also behind the backs of so-called partners. This latest research will hopefully give the reader a broader range of examples drawn from others' experiences, and some pointers to key issues for both understanding and action. What is now needed is more genuine dialogue, in-depth listening, more reflection and systematic planning, a more determined search for examples of best practice, and the creation of practical solutions that can and will be implemented in a disciplined, responsible and sustained way.

At a BOND workshop of UK NNGOs held in late 2004 there was a feeling of frustration that, while they had repeatedly had presentations on problems with North-South partnerships, little had been done in offering solutions. Transform Africa therefore plans to build on the current research finding and to start a new Partnership Advisory Centre (initially based within its UK office) as an outcome of this research and of the wider experiences that continue to be shared by both NNGOs and SNGOs. This will enable the provision of an independent partnership facilitation and mediation service, which will eventually be provided throughout the Transform Network to support organisations which are starting new partnerships or are endeavouring to make existing ones healthier.

## APPENDIX A RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

Different research methods were employed to gather information in different situations. In Rwanda, informal group work with the help of interpretation was used. In the UK, individual office interviewing was the main method. In Tanzania and Zimbabwe, more extensive and sophisticated methods were the norm (see country reports at [www.transformafrica.org](http://www.transformafrica.org)).

All Africa-based enquiries were grouped around the common framework of a semi-structured questionnaire, as follows:

- **Consultation over policy change**

1. Generally speaking, how would you rate your involvement in the decision-making processes of your Northern partners? How important is your participation to you?
2. Looking at the different relationships you currently have with NNGOs is there a practice as regards Southern partner involvement in the decision-making process that you would like to see more widely adopted?
3. Do you have any suggestions that may increase your involvement and that of other national NGOs in the decision-making processes of your northern partners?
4. Do any of your NNGO partners have field offices in your country? If so, what difference do you feel that this has had as regards your participation in that organisation's decision making processes?

- **Contractual agreements**

1. What in your opinion is the main function of MOUs and agreements?
2. Have you or your organisation ever been unhappy with the contents of an MOU or agreement? How was that situation subsequently resolved?
3. Has there ever been a time when you were given an opportunity of writing an MOU or agreement yourself and then presenting the document produced to a NNGO? If not, would you welcome that opportunity?
4. What suggestions do you have as regards the drawing and writing up of agreements as regards length, content, language etc?

- **Information sharing**

1. Do you feel that there is an equal exchange of information between your organisation and the NNGOs you work with? What kind of information is routinely exchanged between them and your organisation?
2. Has there ever been a situation in which you were denied information that you required? If so, what was the reason given for this and how was the problem subsequently resolved?
3. What do you think SNGOs can do in order to receive the information that they require?

- **Relationship change**

1. What do you think that SNGOs need to do in order to change their relationships with their northern counterparts?
2. What message would you like to convey to NNGOs as to how you generally view relationships between SNGOs and NNGOs?

## APPENDIX B LITERATURE REVIEW

While the actual field research work was undertaken against a wider awareness of the extensive academic and other literature on the subject, and the specific reports from Tanzania and Zimbabwe make reference to additional authors, the following literature list was assembled during the initial desk studies undertaken in 2002-3.

**Anderson, M** Aid: a Mixed Blessing in *Debating Development* (Oxford: Oxfam, 2001)

**Anheier, H** and **Salamon, L** (eds.) *The Nonprofit Sector in the Developing World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998)

**Barghouthi, M** North-South Relations and the Question of Aid in *Development and Patronage: selected articles from Development in Practice* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1997)

**Boonyarak, P** *Accountability Relationships between Northern NGOs and Southern NGOs*. Unpublished paper prepared for delivery at the 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, August 29-September 1, 2002

**Chambers, R** *Participatory Workshops: A Sourcebook of 21 Sets of Ideas and Activities* (London: Earthscan, 2002)

**Choudhury, E** and **Ahmed, S** The Shifting Meaning of Governance: Public Accountability of Third Sector Organisations in Emergent Global Regimes in *International Journal of Public Administration*, 25:4, pp 561-588, 2002

**Clark, J** *Democratizing Development: the Role of Voluntary Organisations* (London: Earthscan, 1995)

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## APPENDIX C                    **ACRONYMS, SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTATION, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**ACRONYMS** - as used in this report and in supporting documents

BOND	British Overseas NGOs for Development
CASEC	Community Aid and Small Enterprise Consultancy, Tanzania
DA	Development Associates, Zimbabwe
DFID	Department for International Development, London
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NNGO	Northern Non-Governmental Organisation
SNGO	Southern Non-governmental Organisation
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
UK	United Kingdom

### **SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTATION**

In a world of information overload, Transform Africa wishes to make its research findings available in a modular way so that people with different needs can access what they require without being overwhelmed with unnecessary documentation. This summary document is therefore available in paper form, and on the website at [www.transformafrica.org/???](http://www.transformafrica.org/???) It is supplemented on the website by -

- A 5-page executive summary headed **Transforming Partnerships** that is found at the start of this report, and which is also available at [www.transformafrica.org/???](http://www.transformafrica.org/???)
- Four country-specific reports dating from 2003-2004 that were prepared for **Rwanda** ([www.transformafrica.org/???](http://www.transformafrica.org/???)), **Tanzania** ([www.transformafrica.org/???](http://www.transformafrica.org/???)), **Zimbabwe** ([www.transformafrica.org/???](http://www.transformafrica.org/???)) and **UK** ([www.transformafrica.org/???](http://www.transformafrica.org/???)). The Zimbabwe report was the last one prepared, and additionally makes a number of comparative references to the other earlier country studies
- **Statistical material** consolidated from all the fieldwork ([www.transformafrica.org/???](http://www.transformafrica.org/???))

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