

## **Helpdesk Research Report: Donor engagement with social movements**

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**Query:** Please provide case studies, examples, and analytical work on how donors have engaged with social movements.

**Enquirer:** DFID, Policy and Research Division

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### **1. Overview**

There is very limited literature on donor engagement with social movements. Of the literature that exists, the majority have been critical of such engagement. It is argued that donor funding of social movements, often through the funding of civil society organisations (CSOs) and NGOs, has co-opted and diluted these movements and led to the defection of its members. This has occurred primarily through donor pressures to institutionalise movements in the form of professionalised NGOs and CSOs. This has resulted in:

- Increasing time and energy dedicated to writing proposals to secure funding and reports instead of to developing a coherent strategy for the movement or engaging with constituent communities.
- A shift away from movement leader accountability to constituent communities to accountability to donors.
- Focus on “safe” projects, such as service delivery, and a shift away from more political goals and radical messages and tactics that donors are unlikely to support.
- Attention to time-limited projects to satisfy donor funding cycles instead of long-term outcomes desired by many members of movements.

It is thus recommended that development agencies do not engage directly with social movements, but rather seek to strengthen the enabling environment for movements. This can be achieved for example by supporting mobilisation processes within civil society, protecting the right to form independent associations and the right to protest, and supporting social movements to communicate in public debates and be visible in the media.

Where donors do still engage with social movements, it is recommended that:

- Efforts should be made to understand the specific nature and aspirations of social movements and to support the realisation of these aspirations.
- Pressures to conform to donor funding processes should be minimised and funding requirements should not be so daunting and time consuming as to take movement leaders away from their original strategies, activities and goals.
- It should be openly acknowledged by donors that the influx of funding may result in opportunistic behaviour on the part of civil society leaders that is unrelated to the objectives of the social movement.

## 2. Key Documents

Igoe, J., 2003, 'Scaling up Civil Society: Donor Money, NGOs and the Pastoralist Land Rights Movement in Tanzania', *Development and Change*, vol. 34, no. 5, pp. 863-885

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/118829630/abstract>

This paper discusses the pastoralist land rights movement in Tanzania in the 1990s, driven by non-governmental organisations, and the intervention of international donors to support civil society. It argues that donor support to NGOs failed to consider the institutional impacts of their assistance on the social movement and the formation of civil society. These NGOs and the pastoralist movement initially had widespread community support, due primarily to the progress made by these organisations in addressing longstanding community problems, such as food insecurity and lack of medical services, and contesting the legality of land grabs through court cases. However, the influx of donor funding to NGOs and corresponding requirements, resulted in a modification in the structure of NGOs and the behaviour of NGO leaders in several ways:

- Western donors actively encouraged institutionalisation according to western standards, in the form of departments, directors, programme staff and constitutions, and the establishment of a co-ordinating forum, called UMBRELLA.
- Individuals with the skills to run modern NGOs were in short supply and often were overburdened with daily operations.
- Much time and energy was dedicated to ongoing proposal writing to gain funding and reporting, at the expense of developing a coherent strategy for the movement.
- Donor agendas and time frames influenced the types of activities and programmes NGOs chose to undertake. These tended to be concrete, time-limited projects or high profile events that did not require community consensus.
- Funding attracted opportunists within pastoralist communities, which forced founders of organisations to protect their positions.

The paper considers these pressures to have been responsible for the decline in NGO accountability to constituent communities and the decline in community participation. The political movement geared toward specific outcomes was transformed into a group of apolitical institutions focused on the process of donor funding cycles. The paper also critiques the encouragement by donors to establish a new co-ordinating body to replace UMBRELLA when it ran into troubles instead of trying to reinvigorate the forum and to learn lessons from past experience. Ultimately, donors themselves created a substitute coordinating organisation called FORUM.

The paper stresses several key points to take from this case study:

- It is important to acknowledge the impact of money and power: problems with some pastoralist NGO leaders engaging in opportunistic behaviour unrelated to the original objective of regaining pastoralist lands was ignored or actively covered up by donors.
- Substituting new organisations is not a quick fix: It should not be assumed, as in the case of UMBRELLA, that a problem can be fixed simply by substituting a new institution for one that is not functioning properly. This attributes problems solely to the institution and ignores problems linked to broader socio-economic processes. This also ignores the possibility of learning from past mistakes by exploring what led to the processes that led to the deterioration of UMBRELLA and identifying its strengths.
- Effective civil society requires community initiatives: local land movements in Tanzania were able to gain concessions from the state. Some form of concerted community mobilisation is thus probably the best option that rural Tanzanians have for gaining some control over land in their communities. Unfortunately, most donors are currently ill-equipped to support this type of social movement as its long-term outcomes will be difficult to quantify and its day-to-day dynamics will not correspond well with established reporting procedures.

**McKie, K., 2007, 'The Process of Donor Funding as the Cause of Social Movement Decline: A Case Study of the Barabaig Land Rights Movement in Tanzania', Paper Presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, 12 April, Chicago**  
[http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p197933\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p197933_index.html)

Bringing together literature on social movements and literature on donor funding, this paper seeks to examine whether international donor funding to grassroots social movements is connected to their decline. It focuses on the Barabaig indigenous land reclamation movement in Tanzania and draws on comparisons of other indigenous rights movements from East Africa. It finds that donor funding and its conditionalities resulted in the professionalisation of the social movement organisation, disillusionment of members, and the demobilisation of the Barabaig movement and movements in other African countries. The specific dynamics are:

- Donor funding cycles have pushed recipients to adopt projects that will produce immediate results
- Donors are wary of supporting rights movements that could disturb political balance and stability within weak states and more keen on "safe" projects, such as construction of schools. Thus, grass-roots social may feel pressured to adopt less political goals and less radical tactics, as was the case with the Barabaig movement. This and other social movement organisations have also changed their focus to service delivery in order to secure funding and neglected empowerment goals.
- The professionalization and bureaucratisation within the leadership structure, in order to secure donor funding and meet donor requirements (e.g. paperwork, training and reporting requirements) can result in movement leaders spending more time in offices in the capital city than with activists on the group, as occurred with Barabaig movement leaders. As movement members begin to perceive that their leaders are more accountable to foreign donors, this can result in a process of disillusionment, alienation and defection from the movement.

The paper stresses however, that donor engagement does not inevitably lead to the demobilisation of social movements. It points to other indigenous social movement groups that have managed to achieve their goals following the influx of donor funding. It advocates for research to investigate the differences in the funding processes across donors in order to identify donors with policies that would still allow for movements to maintain their original aims, strategies and goals. In addition, it stresses that the process of professionalisation is necessary but not sufficient to cause the demobilisation of the movement. In the case of the Barabaig movement, it asserts that despite the alteration of movement goals, strategies and funding base, leaders could have retained their former decentralised decision-making structures, spent more time in villages, planned occasional protests or other direct action activities. This might have preserved the commitment of movement member.

**Laurie, N., Andolina, R. and Radcliffe, S., 2002, 'Ethnodevelopment: Social Movements, Creating Experts and Professionalising Indigenous Knowledge in Ecuador', Antipode, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 470-496**  
<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com.ezproxid.bham.ac.uk/journal/118691245/abstract>

This paper looks at ethnodevelopment, referred to as the incorporation of local knowledge in development paradigms, and the rise to prominence of indigenous social movements as development actors. In many Latin American countries with large indigenous populations, indigenous people have mobilised against the dismantling of rural development programmes and neoliberal stabilisation policies. These movements have pushed for development-with-identity, which reflects indigenous knowledge, realities and needs. Alongside, donors have become interested in indigenous knowledge and social capital in development expertise and solutions. The paper stresses that this has resulted in the development professionalisation and scaling up of indigenous knowledge. Large-scale programmes have been established with the aim of

disseminating and transferring specific indigenous knowledge to other contexts, e.g. the the World Bank's 'Indigenous Knowledge for Development' programme, UNESCO's 'Best Practice of Indigenous Knowledge' and UNDP's 'Indigenous Knowledge Program'. Such large-scale transnational initiatives have required knowledge to be professionalised (ordered and systematised) such that it can be circulated and shared.

Professionalisation of indigenous knowledge, the paper argues, has bound local indigenous knowledge production in transnational development discourses and networks that includes donors, indigenous movements, NGOs and states, and generated struggles over controlling the spaces of knowledge production. The diverse actors in the transnational development network do not necessarily agree about how this knowledge should be represented. For example, some indigenous leaders see knowledge as unique to a given culture or society and only local, rather than transnational or universal.

The paper also notes that the systematisation and institutionalisation of indigenous information flows in transnational development networks do not necessarily empower Southern network members. International funding mechanisms and donor requirements for monitoring and report writing can constrain Southern NGOs in their ability to incorporate their ideas into donor agendas. In some cases, indigenous movements blur the distinctions between 'indigenous' and 'Western' knowledge as indigenous knowledge is drawn into donors' discourses and institutionalised.

**Earle, L., 2007, 'International NGOs and Indigenous Social Movements', INTRAC policy briefing paper, no. 15, International NGO Training and Research Centre, Oxford**  
<http://www.intrac.org/data/files/resources/303/Briefing%20Paper%2015%20-%20INGOs%20and%20indigenous%20social%20movements.pdf>

This policy brief is based on a research project aimed to investigate the engagement between international conservation NGOs and indigenous social movements. In particular, the project sought to understand how financial and technical support from international non-governmental actors impacts on indigenous social movements in terms of their mission, activities, membership and self-presentation. It focuses on the indigenous organisation, COMARU (Consejo Machiguenga del Rio Urubamba, or Machiguenga Council of the Urubamba River), which represents 30 communities of predominantly Machiguenga people in the Peruvian Amazon. Organisations within these communities have increasingly mobilised in radical protest against the presence of energy companies in order to protect local livelihoods.

Much literature on social movements stress that they are likely to be weakened or co-opted by entering into partnerships with more powerful international organisations. External sponsors often encourage the pursuit of particular goals that may dilute the indigenous movement. The brief notes that oftentimes the priorities of the large conservation organisations differed considerably from those of COMARU and the Machiguenga directly affected by the energy companies. Nonetheless, this research project finds that social movements can act strategically to avoid or minimize such negative outcomes. In the case of COMARU, community organisations were cognizant of the risk of collaboration with INGOs. COMARU negotiated with different funding sources and acted strategically and cautiously in deciding whether to enter alliances with conservation organisations.

The brief asserts that support for COMARU and indigenous movements more generally should be directed toward the realisation of the indigenous group's actual aspirations and external organisations should seek to understand these aspirations and the specific nature of the indigenous social movement. The brief also cautions that while some social movements may continue even after its success or failure by transforming into an organisational form similar to an NGO, this transition can be problematic if: (i) it is an unintended consequence of donor support for a radical movement; or (ii) without prior knowledge or consent of its members.

**Earle, L., 2007, 'Indigenous Social Movements and International NGOs in the Peruvian Amazon', INTRAC paper, International NGO Training and Research Centre, Oxford**  
<http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/ViewOutputPage.aspx?data=IWEC7sNY9jlnfD32Q%2fmeIPy2Z95wEGwMilPOpEWE8C29QqIMriH4kfCLRTP%2bv2CFk6ULwh8W0ahcX4NeXRzNg09VxKCPuA9KykhrT%2baw9sdFMa%2byJXGD3KDQwQ611Qf2&xu=0&isAwardHolder=&isProfiled=&AwardHolderID=&Sector=>

This report provides more details in relation to the policy brief above. A key point it makes is that although COMARU and the Machiguenga communities it represents have been strong enough to challenge activities, initiatives and attitudes of external actors that were not in their interests ('cooptation on the ground'), it has been unable to challenge cooptation at a distance. For example, while COMARU has been able to distance itself from locally based projects that it does not consider to be in the best interests of its members, it cannot prevent its presence on the websites of international NGOs, in their publications and public statements that COMARU, or the use of its name to put forward agendas that are not necessarily its own.

**Vincent, R and Stackpool-Moore, L., 2009, 'Moved to Act: Communication Supporting HIV Social Movements to Achieve Inclusive Social Change', Development in Practice, 19: 4, 630-642**  
<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a913196785?words=social|movements|poverty|development&hash=2865449165>

This paper profiles experiences of communication and social mobilisation with HIV and other social movements in Brazil, Namibia, and South Africa. It notes that social movements can address poverty reduction by politicising aspects of poverty and widening public debate. It stresses the potential, however, for powerful civil society groups to dominate spaces for democratic engagement. There is a section in the paper on the implications for development agencies working with social movements, given the tendency of movements to mobilise against governments and the status quo (see pp. 639-640). It highlights the following risks involved in development agency engagement:

- Development agencies risks elevating the views of some above others, and possibly splitting or weakening a movement in which there may be ongoing power struggles over priorities
- Formal development organisations and processes may endanger the community ownership and involvement that comprises a big part of social movements. As movements become institutionalised and 'professionalised', new formal organisations have the tendency to become preoccupied with sustaining donor funding and move away from the communities that originally took action.

The paper recommends that given these risks, it is advisable for development agencies to focus on strengthening the enabling environment for movements rather than direct support. This can be achieved by supporting more broadly the right to form independent associations, protecting human rights and the right to protest, and supporting social movements to communicate in public debates and be visible in the media.

**Ballard, R. et al., 2005, 'Globalisation, Marginalisation and Contemporary Social Movements in South Africa', African Affairs, 104/417, pp. 615-634**  
<http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/cgi/reprint/104/417/615.pdf>

This article aims to provide a broad framework for the rise of new social movements in post-apartheid South Africa. It outlines the evolution of movements in the country (see Figure 1, p. 622). During the apartheid era, the global anti-apartheid movement operated in opposition to the

South African Government. In the immediate post-apartheid phase, the anti-government movements dissolved as old networks and avenues of opposition (the ANC, civics and NGOs) were absorbed into the post-apartheid government or worked in close collaboration with government. Donor funding was directed to the new ANC government. This new government was now seen to be working on issues of poverty and deprivation, eliminating some of the motivation for mobilisation. Further, the institutional environment that had historically enabled mobilisation had disappeared. NGOs faced increasing pressure to 'professionalise' – to adopt more technocratic approaches to development, in particular the establishment efficient financial and management systems and focus on delivery. From the late 1990s onward, movements began to rise again as conflicts emerged over the most appropriate development path. These new movements are diverse and cover a range of issues, such as land equity, gender, sexuality, racism, environment etc. Donors in the late 1990s continued to provide funding to the ANC and also directed funding to civil society, including social movements.

**Tembo, F. et al, 2007, 'Multi-donor Support to Civil Society and Engaging with 'Non-traditional' Civil Society: A Light-touch Review of DFID's Portfolio', Overseas Development Institute, London**

<http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/259.pdf>

This review, commissioned by DFID, is aimed at improving lesson-learning on multi-donor programmes working with civil society and donor engagement with 'non-traditional' CSOs beyond professionalised NGOs, including grassroots movements. The review notes that rigid funding arrangements and reporting requirements of some multi-donor instruments may impose formal management structures on non-traditional CSOs. This could in turn disturb the balance of power within the membership and undermine the ability of these CSOs to draw on voluntary and loosely associated memberships. It thus cautions against over-institutionalising non-traditional partners.

**Fernand, V., 2006, 'NGOs, Social Movements, External Funding and Dependency', Development, vol. 49, no. 2, pp. 22-28**

<http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/pal/dev/2006/00000049/00000002/art00005>

*It was not possible to access this journal article. The following abstract is taken from the publisher's site.*

Fernand Vincent looks at issues related to the financing sources and how they relate to the autonomy of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Is it possible for these organizations to remain autonomous with regard to their objectives and strategies, when an important percentage of their activities and functioning is financed by external sources? What are the potential risks of these different external financial sources? What interest is there for external partners in financing these activities? Or can one challenge a system when one is dependent on it? He points out the differences between NGOs and transnational social movements (TSMs) concerning both their financing sources and possible implications. He argues that NGO leaders and others must look at how to improve the search for financial and political independence and a transparency that is necessary for the success of the changes they want to promote.

## 5. Additional information

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**Websites visited**

AWID, Centre for Civil Society LSE, Eldis, GSDRC, Google, Google Scholar, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Institute for Policy Development and Management (IDPM), Informaworld, INTRAC, OECD, Social Movements Group, Tufts University, UNRISD, University of Manchester, UNIFEM

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