

## **Summary of Challenges and Opportunities facing NGOs and the NGO Sector**

The Challenges and Opportunities listed below were generated from 5 of the first 11 regional NGO workshops; this exercise was not undertaken in Nairobi due to time constraints!

### **Challenges:**

**Lack of Funds:** NGOs are expressing difficulty in finding sufficient, appropriate and continuous funding for their work. They find accessing donors as challenging as dealing with their funding conditions. They perceive there to be certain cartels of individuals and NGOs that control access to donor funds. They have limited resource mobilization skills and are often not looking for funds that are available locally, preferring to wait for international donors to approach them. There is a high dependency of donors and a tendency to shift interventions to match donor priorities. There is a lack of financial, project and organizational sustainability.

**Poor Governance** was recognized within the sector as a whole, within the NGO Council and within individual NGOs. Knowledge of good governance varied widely, with some regions indicating very little understanding of why NGOs are required to have Boards or what their roles and functions should be. Many other participants explained that it is difficult to achieve good governance with founders who wished to own their NGOs for their own purposes. Participants with better understanding of good governance appreciated that this is fundamental to NGO accountability and transparency. Many NGOs mismanage their resources, quite often with the involvement and encouragement of their Boards that eat their NGOs resources. Finding Board members can be difficult if you are not willing to pay them or provide allowances.

**Absence of Strategic Planning:** Few NGOs have strategic plans which would enable them to have ownership over their mission, values and activities. This leaves them vulnerable to the whims of donors and makes it difficult to measure their impact over time.

**Poor Networking** was identified as a major challenge. It is the cause of duplication of efforts, conflicting strategies at community level, a lack of learning from experience and an inability of NGOs to address local structural causes of poverty, deprivation and under-development. Negative competition for resources also undermines the reputation of the sector and the effectiveness of NGO activities at community level. As a result there is a great deal of suspicion among NGOs, secrecy and lack of transparency. Many NGOs, large and small, intervene at community level without any community mapping and implement projects without due regard

to ongoing community initiatives. NGO politics: one fighting another, one with resources but no community presence, another with community presence but no resources.

**Poor Communications:** NGOs also recognize that there is very poor communication within the sector. The majority of NGOs have little or no access to reliable email and internet connections, they receive almost no literature on development issues and are generally out of touch with issues of global, regional and national importance. Their lack of understanding of the difference between the Board and Council is just one example of the knowledge gaps that exist.

**Limited Capacity:** NGOs recognize that many of them have limited technical and organizational capacity. Few NGOs are able or willing to pay for such capacity building. Weak capacity was identified in fundraising, governance, technical areas of development, and leadership and management. Some NGOs felt that the existence of quality standards would assist them to develop the required capacities. The speed of technology changes is also a challenge particularly in areas of IT capacity.

**Development Approaches:** Many NGOs are still focusing upon what some refer to the 'hardware' approach to development, i.e. the building of infrastructure and the provision of services; rather than what some refer to as the 'software' approach of empowering people and local institutions to manage their own affairs. Other NGOs seem unaware of changes in the role of government, the changing Aid paradigm, and the effectiveness of a "right's based" rather than "welfare" approach. While it is becoming harder to fund and sustain service delivery interventions, most local NGOs persist with them. Community poverty and illiteracy rates remain significant. NGOs are acutely aware of the increasing and enormous needs of poor people and feel at a loss as to how they can respond to all these needs. There is a lack of sustainability and ownership of development interventions by communities. Some communities have been spoilt by dependency creating interventions and are not inclined to do things for themselves. It is difficult to keep our programmes relevant to changing situations and the culture of handouts is hard to counter. There is no accepted code of ethics and conflicting approaches.

**Relationships with INGOs:** There is considerable concern among local NGOs that the giants, mainly INGOs, occupy so much space that it is very difficult to find room for themselves. INGOs often intervene without any concern for the building of sustainable local CSOs. They pay government and community members to participate in their projects while local NGOs have no facility for doing so. INGOs are also perceived to be driven by short-term project approaches that are not locally sustainable. They pay high salaries and attract local NGO personnel. They are also responsible for creating the high cost image that undermines the credibility of the

sector. It is difficult and inappropriate for local NGOs to compete with the international and national giants. Many external organizations are not working with local CSOs, they simply provide unfair competition and hold back the development of our sector and cost effective development interventions. International NGOs should not be allowed to work on the ground, they pay allowances and manipulate the people; cannot run this nation on the whims of international NGOs; they suppress local NGOs.

**Political Interference:** In some regions, in particular South Rift and North Eastern, NGO leaders identified the interference of local politicians and civic leaders as a major hindrance to their work. Where NGOs are involved in sensitive issues, such as land disputes, local leaders can threaten NGOs with de-registration. NGOs are not aware that the Board - and potentially the Council - are there to protect them from such intimidation.

**NGO Board and NGO Council:** Many participants were poorly informed of the difference between these two institutions, NGO Coordination Board and the National Council of NGOs; and unaware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to them. Most participants expressed the opinion that the NGO Code of Conduct is outdated and needed updating soon. This group of participants also complained that the NGO Council is poorly governed and doesn't provide any services to the NGOs. They were aware that the NGO Board does not respect the Council and that there is mistrust between the Government and NGOs. Participants are well aware that the NGO sector has a very poor public profile which they see as mainly due to the leadership wrangles, politics and infighting at the Council and among NGOs. While most participants appreciated the positive role of the NGO Board in creating an enabling environment for NGOs, a few participants felt there was a lack of political good will towards NGOs in some parts of government. Some branches of government are thought to deliberately frustrate NGOs. A few participants felt that government bureaucracy holds back the NGO sector and its members.

### **Opportunities:**

**Local Resource Mobilization** provides potential for NGOs to raise funds from local businesses, individuals, government and locally generated income. To do this NGOs must have strong governance and accountability mechanisms, clear strategies and local credibility.

**Local Networking** provides opportunities for mutual learning, identifying appropriate development initiatives, generating learning resources, improving coordination and cooperation with local government, harmonizing approaches to development, and pursuing effective local advocacy. Form consortia to source funding from the donor community (larger projects to access larger donors).

**Regional NGO Networks:** Regional and thematic networks present opportunities to NGOs to share research, approaches, resources, capacity and work with both GoK and the corporate sector. Strong regional networks also provide the basis for supporting district level networks and ensuring the NGO Council remains strong by keeping its membership strong.

**Effective support from the NGO Board and NGO Council:** Maintaining NGO records with the NGO Coordination Board will enable NGOs to receive regular information and gain access to basket funding. The NGO Coordination Board is also working hard to improve the public image of NGOs through the promotion and support of annual NGO Week. A more effective NGO Council supported by its members and responding to NGO expressed needs, will provide appropriate and affordable capacity building support and an enabling environment for the sector. Good Governance of the NGO Council would provide a positive example for all NGOs to emulate. Good Governance can be achieved if the serious, active and engaged NGOs exercise their rights and responsibilities in a professional manner. An effective NGO Council will become a voice of the sector when interacting with GoK and Regional Governments.

**Enabling Environment:** The new governmental dispensation has provided Kenyans with more political space to undertake their own development initiatives. People at all levels of society are more prepared to pursue their own development activities rather than wait for government and external actors to provide services, relief and welfare support. Improved infrastructure (roads, electricity, IT, communications, water, market access) provides more development opportunities to poor people and their communities. Tax incentives are now encouraging donations to registered charities. GoK is also enhancing the performance of its line Ministries, who are now all on performance contracts. GoK technical personnel are now willing to partner with NGOs who need not duplicate skills that are already locally available.

**New NGO Act:** The proposed new NGO Bill and Act, provides both opportunities and threats to the NGO community. If the NGO Council effectively lobbies for the NGOs in an informed and professional manner, a more enabling environment for this sector may result. Alternatively it is possible for the Sector to lose its self regulating mechanism and be controlled by a single government-appointed body.

**Government devolved funds and new funding mechanisms:** The CDF, Constituency Aids Funds, Youth, Women, Water, LATF and other locally available development funding is available to local NGOs and CBOs, which should also be more involved in the management of these funds. New basket funding from central government, through the NGO Board, is also a possibility.

**Corporate Social Responsibility:** The concept and practice of CSR is taking hold in Kenya and many companies are now establishing foundations and development funds for use by CSOs.

**Use Volunteers:** Kenya has a huge supply of idealistic, young, energetic and well educated graduates who are unemployed or underemployed. Many of them are searching for opportunities to serve their country and get work experience. There are also many older experienced professionals willing to give their time to NGOs. Many companies will loan experienced personnel to NGOs. Finally, there are opportunities to appoint international volunteers to fill vacancies that would otherwise require unavailable funds to fill. Student exchange programmes also offer NGOs low cost human resources that can support research, documentation and staff capacity building initiatives.

**Development Approaches:** Communities have assets, wisdom, labour, time, and skills to be applied to their own development programmes. Communities are now willing to work for their own development. Invest in community institution building, train local people; enable them to plan, implement and evaluate their own development programmes, and to access available local resources. Innovative local solutions to local problems always attract support.

**NGO Income Generation:** NGOs with excess assets can use them to generate income which may be used as the NGO determines. Consider renting buildings, providing consultancy, offering training, trading on your name or with locally made products.

**Information, Communication and Technology (ICT):** The world has moved into the technological age. Get connected! Internet and email are fundamental to serious organizations. Set up a simple website and start building your networks and your profile. Share with others your work, approaches and impact.

**Selected INGOs provide potential partnerships:** Progressive INGOs are looking to partner with local institutions and have the ability to provide financial, technical and institution building support. Some also support thematic and issue-based advocacy initiatives that enhance local networking and address the structural causes of poverty, inequity and injustice.