

NGOS: THEIR ROLE IN PROMOTING DEVELOPMENT

by Paul Guinness

WE FREQUENTLY come across the abbreviation NGO in geography lessons, on the television and in newspapers. The term **non-governmental organisation** (NGO) came into common usage in 1945 when the United Nations used it in its Charter to distinguish between intergovernmental agencies and international private organisations (NGOs). Some 25,000 organisations, covering a huge variety of objectives, now qualify as international NGOs. The influence of NGOs on international policy has increased markedly in the last few decades. They have successfully promoted:

- new environmental agreements
- women's rights
- arms control and disarmament measures
- the rights of children, the disabled, the poor and indigenous peoples.

The NGOs that people seem to know most about are those such as Oxfam, CARE, Cafod and WaterAid which seek to improve economic and social development in poor countries (Figure 1). Such organisations often combine their operations when major human catastrophes occur (flood, drought, earthquake, etc) or when they want to exert maximum pressure on international opinion. The most recent example of the latter is the Jubilee 2000 Campaign on Third World debt. A mounting international NGO campaign is demanding fairer economic policies from the World Trade Organisation (WTO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Kofi



Figure 1: Some well-established NGOs

Annan, the Secretary General of the United Nations, has said that NGOs are 'the conscience of humanity'.

Large NGOs such as Oxfam can have a big impact on public attitudes. In a recent report (2002), Oxfam aimed to shame the world's big four coffee sellers (Nestlé, Procter & Gamble, Sara Lee and Kraft) for 'impoverishing 25 million farmers' in poor nations. Oxfam argues that the global market for coffee needs a complete overhaul to ensure that farmers get a fairer (higher) price for their coffee beans.

NGOs are usually financed from the following sources:

- membership dues – the traditional source of funding
- government grants
- retail operations, eg charity shops
- private foundations, corporations and wealthy individuals.

Increasingly, relief and development NGOs receive large grants from governments' international assistance programmes. Such grants represented, as a proportion of income:

- 1.5% in 1970
- 35% in 1988
- over 40% in 2000.

There are several reasons why the role of NGOs in development has increased:

- 1 They have developed considerable expertise over a number of decades in many different countries.
- 2 They have a more successful track record than other attempts at promoting development. Development is generally targeted very carefully and the impact of projects is also carefully monitored.
- 3 They concentrate on small and medium-scale projects that benefit genuinely poor countries rather than the better-off in LEDCs. Many of the really large-scale

projects in LEDCs, funded by large international organisations such as the World Bank or by individual countries, have had little beneficial impact for the poorest people.

- 4 They work with local people to sustain development in the long term.
- 5 They are seen to be independent of vested interests. Bilateral aid, from one country to another, is frequently criticised because it often seems to serve the interests of the donor nation as much as, if not more than, the country receiving aid.

According to James Paul, executive director of Global Policy Forum:

‘Globalisation has created both cross-border issues that NGOs address and cross-border communities of interest that NGOs represent. National governments cannot do either task as effectively or as legitimately. In the globalising world of the 21st century, NGOs will have a growing international calling.’

However, some writers are concerned by the increasing funding of NGOs by governments, saying that it exposes NGOs to pressure from governments and limits their capacity to act independently.

Case Study

WaterAid

WaterAid was established in 1981. Its first project was in Zambia but its operations spread quickly to other countries (Figure 2), and it completed its 1000th project in 1993.

WaterAid is the UK’s only major charity dedicated exclusively to the provision of safe domestic water, sanitation and hygiene education to the world’s poorest people. These three crucial elements provide the building blocks for all other development. Without them communities

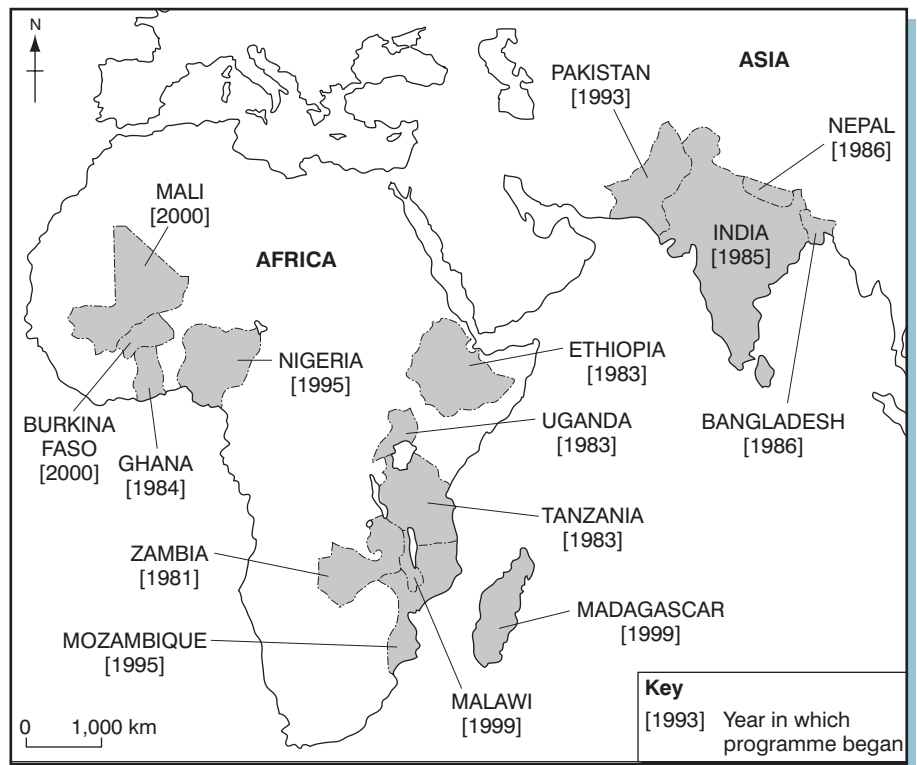


Figure 2: WaterAid programmes in Africa and Asia

Source: WaterAid

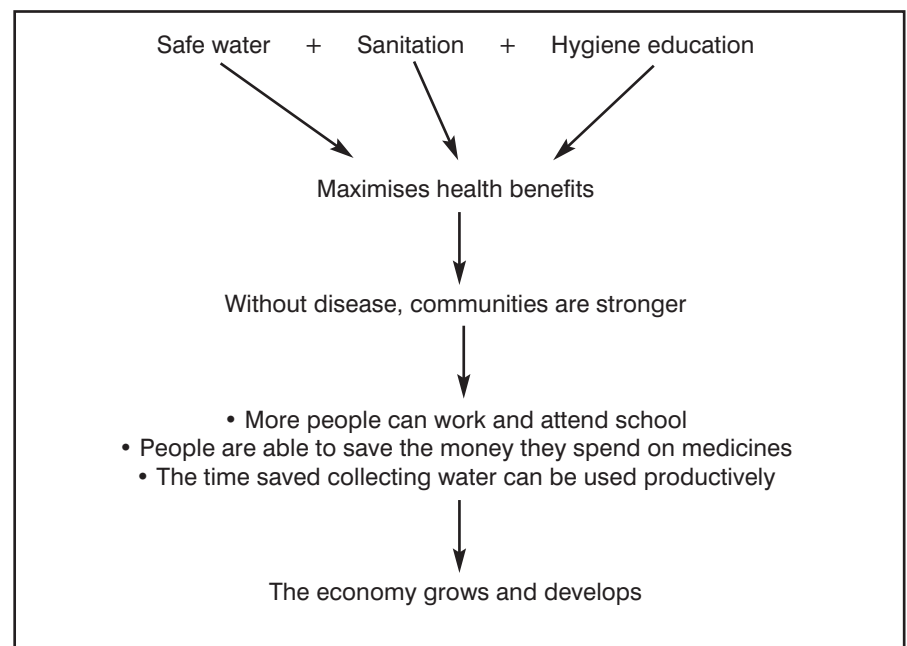


Figure 3: WaterAid’s building blocks of development

remain stuck in a cycle of disease and poverty. The combination of safe water, sanitation and hygiene education maximises health benefits and promotes development (Figure 3). The combined benefits of safe water, sanitation and hygiene education can reduce incidences of childhood diarrhoea by up to 95%. A child dies every 15 seconds from diseases associated

with lack of access to safe water and adequate sanitation. Figure 4 shows water supply and sanitation coverage for the 15 countries in which WaterAid operates.

In the longer term, communities are able to plan and build infrastructure which enables them to cope better in times of hardship. In areas with WaterAid

Country	Water supply coverage (%)	Sanitation coverage (%)
India	88	31
Bangladesh	97	53
Nepal	81	27
Pakistan	88	61
Ghana	64	63
Nigeria	57	63
Mali	57	63
Burkina Faso	N/a	29
Ethiopia	24	15
Madagascar	47	42
Tanzania	54	90
Uganda	50	75
Zambia	64	78
Mozambique	60	43
Malawi	57	77

Figure 4: Water supply and sanitation in countries where WaterAid operates

Source: WaterAid

projects, life in times of drought is eased because:

- previously in times of drought women in particular would spend hours in search of water, leaving little time to find food
- children would also miss out on education in the search for water
- cattle can also be watered, rather than sold or left to die because of water shortage
- during famines, with sanitation, water and hygiene people are sick less often and so are better able to fend off disease.

Many more people have become aware of the activities of WaterAid over the past year or so because 2003 has been the UN International Year of Freshwater. WaterAid works by helping local organisations set up low-cost projects using appropriate (intermediate) technology that can be run by the recipient community itself. The organisation also aims to influence the policies of other important organisations such as governments, to secure and protect the right of poor people to safe, affordable water and sanitation.

WaterAid has recently asked people to sign a petition entitled 'Water Matters', which urges the UK government to:

- 1 urge all UN member governments to agree an action plan for meeting the UN agreed target to halve the number of people without access to drinking water by 2015, and ensure that each country has national policies for managing water resources in place by 2005
- 2 promote and secure an international agreement and action plan to halve the number of people without adequate sanitation by 2015
- 3 increase the UK's official development assistance to the agreed UN target of 0.7% of GNP, prioritising water supply, sanitation and water resources within that increase, and urge other MEDCs to do the same.

Mali, in West Africa, is one of the world's poorest nations (Figure 5). It is one of the countries to benefit recently from a WaterAid project.



The natural environment of Mali is harsh, and is deteriorating. Rainfall levels, which are already low, are falling further and desertification is spreading. Currently 65% of the country is desert or semi-desert. Eleven million people still lack access to safe water. WaterAid has been active in the country since 2000. Its main concern is that the fully privatised water industry frequently fails to provide services to the poorest urban and rural areas. It is running a pilot scheme in the slums surrounding Mali's capital Bamako, providing clean water and sanitation services to the poorest people. Its objective is to demonstrate both to government and to other donors that projects in slums can be successful, both socially and economically.

WaterAid has financed the construction of the area's water network. It is training local people to manage and maintain the system, and to raise the money needed to keep it operational. Encouraging the community to invest in its own infrastructure is an important part of the philosophy of the project. According to Idrissa Doucoure, WaterAid's West Africa Regional Manager, 'We are now putting our energy into education programmes and empowering the communities to continue their own development into the future. This will allow WaterAid to move on and help others.' Already significant improvements in the general health of the community have occurred. The general view is that it takes a generation for health and sanitation to be properly embedded into people's daily life.

Figure 5: Mali: WaterAid in action

Activities

- 1 (a) What is meant by the initials NGO?
- (b) Make a list of all the NGOs you have heard of.
- (c) Compare your list with those of others in your class.
- (d) Produce a 'top five' class ranking of NGOs.

- 2 (a) Where do NGOs get their money from?
- (b) Ask three people who support one or more NGOs the reasons why they chose those particular charitable organisations.
- (c) Which NGOs have shops in your local town centre?

- 3 (a) Why are NGOs receiving much more money from national governments than they did in the past?
- (b) Draw a bar graph to show the proportion of NGO income from this source in 1970, 1988 and 2000.
- (c) Why are some people concerned by this trend?

- 4 (a) How can NGOs, such as Oxfam, change the attitudes of the general public?
- (b) Why are large companies sometimes fearful of the activities of NGOs?

- 5 (a) Draw up a table, in chronological order, to show the countries where WaterAid operates, and the year in which programmes began.
- (b) Suggest why WaterAid chose these particular countries to help.

- 6 Look at Figure 3.
 - (a) What do you understand by the following terms?
 - Safe water
 - Sanitation
 - Hygiene education.
 - (b) Why is it so important to combine these three factors to maximise the health benefits to a community?
 - (c) Explain why healthier communities are more likely to

1981	WaterAid established. First project funded in Zambia.
1982	Regional WaterAid committees formed.
1983	WaterAid starts work in Ethiopia, Tanzania and Uganda.
1984	Programme in Ghana begins.
1985	Indian programme started.
1986	Work begins in Bangladesh and Nepal.
1987	Income exceeds £1 million a year.
1988	Over 350,000 beneficiaries to date.
1989	New privatised water companies pledge continued support to WaterAid.
1990	Fundraising team expanded.
1991	HRH Prince of Wales becomes WaterAid's President.
1992	Tree of life campaign run for the Earth Summit.
1993	WaterAid's 1,000th project completed.
1994	BBC Blue Peter Well appeal raises £1.65 million.
1995	WaterAid awarded Stockholm Water prize.
1996	Hygiene promotion integrated into all projects.
1997	Kitchen garden display at Chelsea Flower Show wins bronze.
1998	Income rises to £8 million a year.
1999	Project officer for urban work appointed.
2000	Work begins in francophone West Africa.
2001	Over 6.5 million beneficiaries to date.
2002	Celebrating 21 years of water for life.

Figure 6: The development of WaterAid, 1981–2002

Source: WaterAid

be able to improve their living standards.

- 7 (a) Name the capital city of Mali.

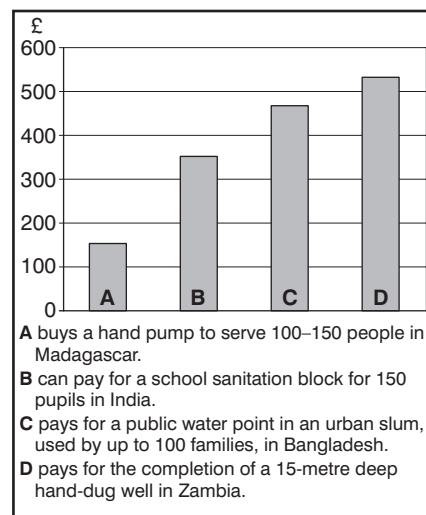


Figure 7: WaterAid: some cost examples

Source: WaterAid

- (b) Using an atlas data sheet or another source, produce a factfile to illustrate the poverty of Mali.
- (c) Briefly describe the role that WaterAid is playing in the country.
- (d) How effective do you feel the WaterAid project is?

8 Study Figure 6. Write a newspaper article, no more than 400 words in length, about the development of WaterAid since 1981. Include one graph based on data provided in the timechart.

- 9 Look at Figure 7.
 - (a) How much does it cost for each of the improvements shown by the bar graph?
 - (b) Suggest how WaterAid decides what to spend money on in each individual country it operates in.

10 Look at WaterAid's website: www.wateraid.org.uk Research the activities of WaterAid in two countries other than Mali.