

**Lessons in Aid Effectiveness from Civil Society  
Case Studies Prepared for the  
Canadian Council for International Co-operation**

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**Making "Local Ownership" a Reality  
Case Study of the Horn of Africa Capacity Building Program  
Oxfam Canada and Oxfam Québec**

This case study outlines the methodology and learning from the Horn of Africa Capacity Building Program (CBP)<sup>1</sup> in building "local ownership" in the Horn of Africa voluntary sector. Building local ownership was regarded as a *right* but above all as a *duty* of citizens and their organizations.

**"What are you doing here?"**

The Program was launched in June 1997 amidst intense questioning by the government, individuals and organizations in Ethiopia of foreign NGOs. One of the most biting articles published by the Addis Tribune was entitled "*Why Do Hyenas Whine While They Eat?*" The writer criticized "*the million Birr private villas, the expensive automobiles, the exorbitant contract kickbacks, the decadent lifestyles and other illicitly gained benefits that are common with NGOs...*"<sup>2</sup>

CBP decided to face up to the questioning and tried to understand the nature of this uneasiness toward foreign NGOs. The exercise often proved stressful for staff. However, it contributed to develop a better appreciation of the concerns expressed openly by Ethiopians and shared more quietly by many others in the Horn of Africa. The outcome of the exercise was instrumental in defining CBP's approach to the reinforcement of CSOs in the Horn.

Although Ethiopians might have good reasons to be dissatisfied with the costs associated with traditional aid program management, using expatriate staff, CBP felt that it was important to ask the same questions of the critics. "What is your motivation? Who supports you? Who are your constituents? As we will see later, these questions were also to translate into central issues for discussion with potential partners.

CBP organized a regional consultation with a view to developing a profile of civil society in the Horn of Africa. The findings enabled the program to adopt a three-fold classification of civil society organizations: (1) traditional, (2) semi-modern and (3) modern. This classification did not translate into a rigid framework, for Goran Hyden, the author of *No Shortcuts to Progress*, underlined to CBP the "syncretic" [hybrid] nature of CSOs in terms of combining local features and values of indigenous/traditional and external/modern environments. CBP gave priority to CSOs merging traditional and modern features and used the findings of the consultation to

engage in a structured dialogue with them. Their traditional aspects ensured authenticity and their modern characteristics enabled them to develop relationships with external actors in accordance with the Ethiopian law.

### **"We are not here to encourage begging"**

CBP's experience suggests that the concept of constituencies is not widely internalized by local NGOs in the Horn of Africa. One reason could be that a large number of national NGOs were created as the result of funding made available by external resource providers. Their disconnection with an identifiable membership and/or constituency has given rise to cynicism among many ordinary people in the Horn of Africa. On the other hand, local associations at the sub-national level have often emerged as a response to specific issues faced by their communities and are by and large more grounded in and accountable to their society.

GAVO in Berbera, Somaliland, is one of these "anchored" organizations and it had a decisive impact on CBP's approach. GAVO is a youth organization that came together after the end of the civil war in Somaliland with the intent to contribute to the emergence of a new society. Their former Koranic teacher advised them to look for the most destitute people in Berbera and to assist them. GAVO identified the patients of the Berbera Mental Hospital as their prime beneficiaries. Its members sensitized the local population on mental health in a post-war situation and brought to the attention of the public the plight of fellow citizens and relatives institutionalized at the Berbera Mental Hospital or left drifting in the streets of the town. After overcoming initial suspicion and establishing its credibility in the community, GAVO progressively developed a local resource base, which spreads across the entire local economy, from hay sellers to cattle exporters. CBP documented GAVO's experience in a case study, which was widely disseminated in the Horn of Africa.

### **"Tough love"**

The experience of GAVO validated one of the key assumptions driving CBP: *"Local Resource Mobilization" minimizes the risk of external resource providers hijacking the relationships between local groups and their constituencies and undermining local accountability.* It also confirmed the relevance of CBP's guidelines and standards for partnerships. Criteria used to assess the eligibility of CSOs for partnership with CBP include: (1) autonomy, (2) democratic structures and practices, (3) financial accountability, (4) open recruitment, (5) rootedness, (6) local resource mobilization and (7) advocacy.

"Accountabilities"<sup>3</sup> and "local resource mobilization" have been particularly challenging for many national NGOs to take on board. The Program views both of them as prerequisites for an effective ownership of the development process. Hence, CBP engaged groups seeking financial support in a participatory reflection process, which included three major exercises: (1) the development of an organizational profile, (2) project design based on the findings of the organizational profile, and (3) a partnership annual review summarizing significant progress and setbacks in terms of the above criteria and agreed-on changes. These processes generated a large volume of information, which was used to transform the relationships over the years and to move toward customized exit strategies.

Partners have not always found the dialogue process leading to partnership easy. CBP staff called it a "tough love" approach. However, an independent evaluation indicated that partners valued the consistent and structured approach adopted, and reported that CBP methodology enabled them to understand their organizations and critical gaps to be addressed.

CBP also launched an action / research project in Ethiopia to understand what Ethiopians - outside the government - were doing, on their own initiative, to address some of their development challenges. Through this initiative, the program was able to develop non-funding relationships with 28 Ethiopian groups practicing "volunteerism" and "local resource mobilization". CBP endeavored (1) to provide recognition to these groups for their capacity to anchor their activities in their own society, (2) to facilitate their coming together and (3) to expose them to new knowledge. The group decided to formalize their relationship through the setting up of the Ethiopian Association for Voluntary Services (EAVOS), a national network promoting volunteerism in Ethiopia.

EAVOS is the ninth network with whom CBP developed a relationship. The others include seven sub-national networks and one national network. These networks address the following issues: (1) environmental conservation, (2) women's livelihood, (3) information access, (4) volunteerism (5) gender equality and (6) non-formal education. Local groups view networks as an effective means to overcome physical, mental, informational and social isolation and to promote lateral learning. Through these established and emerging networks, CBP introduced key concepts for greater ownership of their development process: (1) "*the role of information in the development process*" based on the research work of Prof. Kingo Mchombu from the University of Namibia, (2) "*accountabilities*" based on the experience of GAVO in Somaliland, (3) "*self-evaluation tools for civil society as individual entities and as a sector*" based on a regional consultation (Langano Encounter) bringing together CSO, academia, business and government, and (4) "*volunteerism*" based on a CBP's action/research initiative<sup>4</sup>.

Through CBP, partners had opportunities to have direct access to a pool of highly respected scholars and experts in the domains they were involved in.

### **"What did you say?"**

A second key assumption behind CBP's approach is: *The Horn (CSOs, academics, development practitioners) should critically analyze its recurrent lack of development opportunities and develop a customized and credible development discourse.* By this we meant that often complaints like those in the "Whining Hyenas" story blame all problems on foreign interventions<sup>5</sup>, without a rigorous analysis of how internal and external weaknesses (and strengths) interact to create dysfunctional patterns between local and external actors. CBP aimed to encourage a deeper, grounded and solution-oriented analysis and discourse.

To support this process, CBP drew on two major sources to frame its overall methodology: (1) the concept of *civic public realm* formulated by Goran Hyden and (2) the *Grassroots Development Framework* developed by the Inter-American Foundation (IAF) to monitor and evaluate its support to CSOs in Latin America.

Capacity building was articulated around the three axes of Hyden's *civic public realm*: (1) Citizen Influence, (2) Social Interactions and (3) Responsive and Responsible Public Governing Structures. In addition, IAF's indicators such as *Local Resource Mobilization, Adaptability, Organizational Relationships, Legislative Influence* helped capture and discuss the progress or lack thereof in the ability of partners to facilitate the development process they were engaged in.

The continuum defined by Hyden for CSOs interventions stretches from *Social & Economic Matters* to *Civic and Political Matters*. The high level of poverty in many areas of the Horn and a legacy of authoritarian regimes force many CSOs to mobilize around improving the standards of living of people and to confine themselves largely to *Social & Economic Matters*.

At the other end of the spectrum, *Civic and Political Matters* are associated with greater complexity and at times serious risks for CSOs. However, some domains are less overtly political such as *Gender, Environment, HIV/AIDS*, which are viewed as more acceptable and can be used as platforms for practicing advocacy work and policy influence at local, sub-national, national and regional levels.

For instance, a national task force in Ethiopia and GAVO in Somaliland initiated a dialogue with their respective Ministries of Information on the role community radio can play in development. Community radio is not well understood in most of the Horn countries. The Ethiopian National Task Force and GAVO are now familiarizing their governments with this medium through the experience of other African countries. The Ethiopian Task Force formulated a draft policy change, which was recently submitted to the Ministry of Information.

Representatives of the business sector in Ethiopia have often demonstrated remarkable civic courage and proved very articulate in their analysis of policies and attitudes hindering their country's development. CBP developed close relationships with the Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce and individual business people sharing publicly their views on development. CBP and the Addis Ababa Chamber of Commerce initiated a Volunteer-of-the Year Award to encourage volunteerism in society.

There were a few opportunities for direct linkages and exchanges between Canadian and Horn constituencies under CBP. One of these was the Addis-based Program Officer sharing the findings of her research work on volunteerism in Ethiopia with Oxfam Canada's membership during its general assembly in Vancouver and with constituencies in Toronto and Ottawa as well as with other Southern organizations in conferences in Kenya and India. Canadians realized that Canada and Ethiopia share similar understanding of volunteerism and philanthropy. The chair of Oxfam Canada's Board participated in a consultation on civil society, which was held in Ethiopia.

### **"Don't hang too close to me!"**

Two key elements were used to facilitate the transition to local ownership of the development process. First, CBP invested significantly in a knowledge-based approach, which has proved demanding and energizing for both staff and partners. Second, it developed and maintained a healthy distance between CBP and its partners.

#### Knowledge-based Approach:

"CBP endeavored to translate core, theoretically based, insights and perspectives into models for action. Concepts drawn from academic writers, particularly Goran Hyden, have been augmented with materials and lessons learned drawn from the capacity building of development agencies, including IAF and IDRC. Both theoretical understandings and methodological frameworks have been continually adapted over time, as CBP staff reflected on their experience, reviewed and assimilated new reading, and engaged in dialogue with both international and national observers, participants and stakeholders.

CBP's commitment to learning has been its willingness to open itself to scrutiny by various knowledgeable observers, as well as its partners. It has also used ongoing review of relevant academic literature, including the work of African scholars, to hold up a mirror to itself as a means to evaluate its relevance and performance"<sup>6</sup>.

#### Healthy Distance:

To ensure an effective "arms-length approach" the Program invested in the capacity of its Ethiopian staff and partners across the Horn. Staff received on-the-job training accompanied with immediate delegation of responsibilities. Staff and partners participated in a series of training and exposure visits within Ethiopia and in various countries.

Canadian staff purposefully minimized, whenever possible, their own direct interface with local groups. Development was approached as a duty of citizenship and partnerships were based on the achievements of the agreed-on results and regarded as journeys with clear processes used to map out and analyze progress and setbacks.

After four years in the Horn, Canadian staff relocated to Canada. CBP has been managed "online" since July 2001 with staff in Ottawa, Montreal, Addis Ababa and Khartoum. This translated in substantial savings in expenses that proved irritants for Ethiopians. Distance and online management contributed to greater self-confidence among Ethiopian staff.

Partners indicated during the Performance Review that they appreciated the space provided by the Program in the implementation of agreed-on activities and the flexibility to adjust partnership in response to new developments.

#### **"So what?"**

The "arms-length approach" enabled the Program to advance sensitive issues such as policy change regarding laws governing electronic media in Ethiopia and Somaliland. Direct interventions by foreigners in these areas could have been interpreted as intrusion and provided legitimacy for resistance.

The purpose of development assistance is to create sustainable change in order to decrease poverty. Success in this area requires development of government institutions, the private sector and of voluntary organizations, as well as the interaction between these actors in the public realm. Such change must be built by local people, organizations and institutions. It cannot be done "for" people through the delivery of resources (whether financial, technological or intellectual) by outsiders. Paradoxically, if such resources were readily available locally, there

would be no need for development assistance. CBP chose to address this tension inherent in supporting authentic, appropriate and accountable local capacity development by using a rigorous framework, encouraging networks and learning opportunities, rapidly devolving responsibility and involving African leadership at every opportunity.

Building local ownership, in CBP, has meant:

- Changing the discourse of the "Whining Hyenas";
- A rigorous framework for assessing progress;
- Working with networks within the voluntary sector, as well as with individual organizations;
- Moving from economic and social to civil and political matters;
- Building on the traditional modern syncretism defined by Hyden;
- An emphasis on African research and thinking, which unites the intellectual with the practitioners;
- Dissemination and knowledge-building integral to the methodology; and,
- Devolution of responsibility designed as part of the intervention.

Contributions from the Oxfams as external actors to the process included:

- Translation of theoretically based insights augmented with the experiences of development actors across countries and regions into models for action.
- Capacity to fulfill a bridge building role among local stakeholders traditionally suspicious of each others to build a sense of mutuality, and,
- Introduction of new ideas such as *local resource mobilization*, which led to the development of new skills within CSOs.

### **What's next?**

In our view, the CBP framework merits serious consideration as a tool for guiding CIDA's development strategies that seek stronger and more accountable governments and active participation of citizens.

For more information contact: [raymondg@oxfam.ca](mailto:raymondg@oxfam.ca).

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## **Endnotes**

- 1 CBP is a Canadian bilateral program executed by Oxfam Canada and Oxfam Québec.
- 2 Addis Tribune, June 14, 2002.
- 3 The concept of "accountabilities" refers to financial accountability as well as accountability to membership, constituencies and partners.
- 4 This initiative was short listed for Bill McWhinney Award and is currently the subject of an article co-written by Goran Hyden and Mahlet Hailemariam, CBP Program Officer in Ethiopia.
- 5 The same identification of a need for African ownership and responsibility is the brightest aspect of NEPAD.
- 6 HOACBP, Performance Review, Phillip Rawkins, March 2002