

THE NGO POLICY GROUP - TOWARDS FORMALISATION?

Until we receive feedback from key players about the desired vision and mission for the group it is difficult to make concrete recommendations about the optimum level of formalisation.

This paper thus begins by suggestion that work on devising a code of practice should begin immediately. A very low cost means of doing this is suggested with the recommendation that those who are willing to act should do so even if their numbers are very small in the first instance.

Some concrete options for engaging with the PER and the PRS are also given. Most of these are procedural and could be implemented almost immediately following the development of a code of practice which was 'owned' by the key players.

We then look at the case of TCDD. Although it managed to serve a useful function this was in spite of rather than because of its rather loose and informal, part-time, bolt-on structure.

A couple of generic sections follow covering the concepts of third sector organisational life cycles and there is also a short checklist of issues to be considered in establishing such an organisation.

The paper ends with a brief sketch of a possible organisational structure with a small but independent and well established, two-person secretariat.

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Values and passion

The road to hell is paved with good intentions. It is necessary but not sufficient that people should have passion and capacity; they must also have a vision, a strategy and an action plan (and the energy and resources to put the plan into action!).

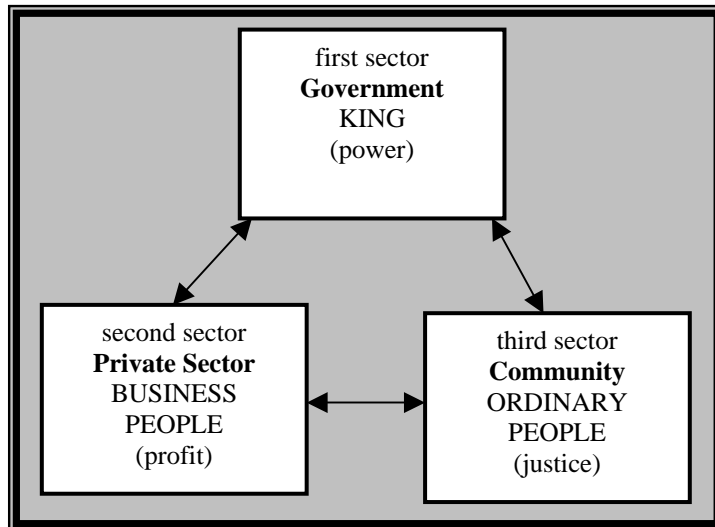
The Civil Society sector could follow the example of the PRSP and set itself well defined targets with associated activities and indicators. This would help to clear the misty haze in which so many good hearted people tend to flounder.

The targets would come from the value system which, for most CSO organisations, is rooted in a concern for:

- social justice
- environmental stewardship
- unleashing human potential (empowering people)
- working collectively through caring and sharing

These four values could be grouped under the banner of 'Justice' (equality of opportunity). This sets the civil society (Third Sector) apart from the first sector where the government of 'kings' is primarily concerned with power, and the second

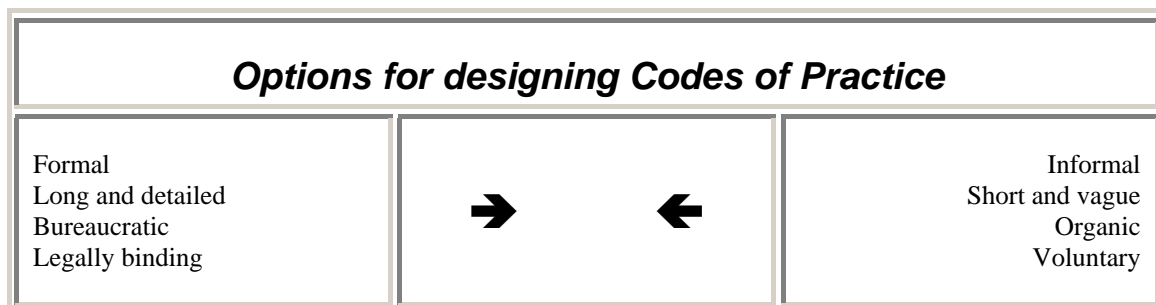
sector where the business people of the private sector are primarily concerned with profit.



The key to effective action in the third sector is "working collectively through caring and sharing". This is the ideal but many individuals and organisations fall short of it. Sometimes consciously but often unconsciously, they act selfishly to defend their own small patch of knowledge, expertise, equipment or funding. If the third sector is to flourish such behaviours must change. How can such changes be made?

Before a problem can be solved it has to be identified and labelled. Codes of good and bad practice (activities) can then be drawn up so that individuals and organisations can (a) set themselves targets and (b) use 'indicators' to measure the extent to which they are hitting the targets.

Codes of Practice can be designed in many ways. Some can be very elaborate and expensive to set up while others can be loose and informal. As with most things it is probably best to be somewhere in the middle.



How to develop a Code of Practice

The NGO Policy Group might use a participatory method to define its own code of practice by using the following simple and very low cost procedure:

Basic Procedure	Refinements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circulate a brief concept paper to all members and request approval to progress the idea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who circulates? Options – Secretariat, volunteer with the capacity, or hired hand (existing staff member or freelance consultant)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask all those willing to participate to brainstorm at least three examples of observably good practice and three of observably bad practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Even if only two or three groups agree in the first instance it is still worthwhile going ahead • Note – you cannot observe ‘values’ but you can observe ‘behaviours’ resulting from those values – we need a list of ‘whats’ not ‘whys’ eg “posts at least three messages to the yahoo group each month” and not “feels that better use of the internet is a good idea” • The brainstorming could be done as an agenda item at a routine meeting and/or by email
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Categorise the items and use them as the basis for a code of good behavioural practice (actions) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convert ‘bad’ behaviours into their ‘good’ equivalents • Option = circulate the first draft of the list to see if it (a) sparks more ideas from those who participated the first time and (b) stimulates participation in those who did not take part on the first round
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite all those willing to participate to rate themselves on their extent of good practice at present and to set themselves timed targets for improvement in the future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Option = voluntary publicising of the targets • Option = periodic reviews of the extent to which individuals and organisations have found that using the Code has improved their own practice and the functionality of their networks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good ideas sell themselves. If groups using the code become more efficient and effective then other groups will want to use it also. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Once the Code has been designed it can be widely circulated (eg through an email list) with the option of much or very little publicity and testimonials about best practice

The code of practice would have to cover the all the key functions of the sector. These would follow from the vision and the mission which is elaborated for the sector so we will not deal with them exhaustively here. It is possible, however, to make a preliminary list of functions related to engaging with the PER and PRS processes.

Concrete options for engaging with the PER and PRS

1. The Secretariat should mastermind a **coordinated lobbying campaign** for more seats at the various tables. Given that there is no formula for selection to these groups there is need of well argued cases for joining. This will include demonstrating a degree of capacity and the ability to contribute quality inputs. Most policy groups are more than willing to accept new members with energy and good ideas.
2. Seats at the various tables should be filled by **people who have the time¹, energy and capacity** to deal with the responsibilities involved. If capacity is a problem then mentoring support can be arranged from other organisations².
3. Organisations should ensure that they **earmark time and resources** in support of their representative. Before (to read and analyse papers), during, and after (to digest and/or distribute papers and otherwise communicate through the networks).
4. Organisations should ensure that there is **continuity of representation** and that the same person attends particular group meetings.
5. When there is **more than one CSO representative in a particular group** (eg PER presently has three) then they should agree which of them
 - 5.1. will take responsibility for which agenda items in any given meeting and
 - 5.2. will send/gather which bits of information to/from which other organisations in the network
6. The Secretariat might hold the **register of which organisations send representatives** to which policy making groups. This would be for two reasons:
 - 6.1. to make the information centrally available to all those groups who might need to know who to contact by way of making inputs to particular policy making bodies, and
 - 6.2. to hold representatives to account for communicating to the larger CSO community about what they are doing individually and as a group. (A Code of Practice should be developed to guide the actions of representatives.)
7. Given the speed with which many responses have to be made and given the vast distances in Tanzania then every possible use must be made of **email and the internet**. Those who are on top of the technology should freely mentor those who are not. A few minutes of quality one on one support is vastly more effective than going on a course.
8. ICT is not available everywhere. Those who are not connected should try to make **physical links** (even just by phone) with nearby organisations who do have the equipment. It follows that organisations that have ICT facilities should be prepared to feed information to local groups which do not. (Such mutualism could be built into a CSO code of practice)
9. The CSO community must develop a **passion for sharing** but passion alone is not enough. Networking needs time and resources – it should not be something that happens by chance. Organisations should budget time and resources to networking and develop **indicators of networking effectiveness** to form part of individual and organisational appraisals.
10. As a matter of priority the NGO Policy Group should make time to develop:
 - 10.1. A Code of Practice for CSO representatives
 - 10.2. A short list of indicators of networking effectiveness³

¹ If a person already has a full workload then they cannot be expected to take on more responsibilities without dropping some of the existing ones.

² This could be in terms of content and/or process (ie assertiveness training). People starting out could perhaps ‘shadow’ more experienced people by way of apprenticeship. Such skill sharing actions (both giving and receiving) could feature in the Code of Practice.

³ For some ideas about Strategic Proactive Networking (SPANning) see www.caledonia.org.uk/spanning.htm

The Case of TCDD

In its time TCDD has served a function similar to what the NGO Policy Group is considering. It is thus worth noting the strengths and weaknesses of the TCDD case.

“In January 2000, the Tanzania Social and Economic Trust (TASOET) and the Tanzania Coalition on Debt and Development (TCDD) organised a round table discussion in Dar es Salaam, jointly with Oxfam, for civil society. Approximately 40 NGOs were represented, with the majority being Tanzanian based.

They discussed the need for civil society engagement in the process of the formulation of the TAS and PRSP, and representatives from the Government, the World Bank and the IMF briefed the participants on the current status of the PRSP.

The outcome was agreement that TCDD be designated overall coordinator of the civil society engagement process, with TASOET given secretarial responsibilities for TCDD. Oxfam was requested to facilitate funding, and be accountable for donor resources. Civil society working groups were also formed in line with the current government working groups, and permission was obtained for civil society representatives to participate in those.” The Civil Society Working groups were:

TCDD/PRSP Steering Committee overseeing Five Civil Society PRSP Working Groups				
Food Security Group <i>Convenor:</i> Marjorie Mbilinyi	Health Group <i>Convenor:</i> Adolph Kapaniga	Education Group <i>Convenor:</i> Kate Dyer	Participatory Poverty Assessment <i>Convenor:</i> Rosalia Katapa	Macro Economic and Budget Group <i>Convenor:</i> Gemma Akilimali

The official Government invitation to CSOs to become involved in the process was received in March 2000. By the end of August 2000, 50 NGOs were subscribing to the TCDD objectives.

On 4-7 September 2000 TCDD held a workshop at the Oasis Hotel in Morogoro. It was hoped that this would enhance the group/team spirit amongst the members of TCDD who function as a loose coalition.

Aim	to undertake a strategic analysis of TCDD with a view to restructuring for the future..
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to revisit TCDD’s mandate, mission and functions • to define strategic future directions with accompanying activities and implementation plan • to deliberate on how to establish synergetic relationships with key stakeholders and particularly the Government of Tanzania • to consider the options and decide on the structure, organisation and modus operandi of TCDD

The main conclusion was that while the ‘structure’ of TCDD was seriously flawed it nonetheless managed to serve the ‘function’ of influencing national policy related to debt and development within the PRSP framework. Problems with the structure included:

1. no formal legal structure (and thus ‘awkward’ system of funding)
2. role definition – the part time secretariat had a foot in two camps
3. implementation workload – bigger than planned - part time secretariat had problems coping
4. inability to respond quickly enough to the fast changing TAS/PRSP process

Three outputs from the workshop are listed on the next page:

Activity 1: a SWOT analysis

The group was asked to consider TCDD's performance on the PRSP process.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. TCDD is recognised and positively acknowledged by the Government 2. There is no other coalition addressing both debt and poverty issues 3. There is goodwill amongst key NGOs within the coalition 4. TCDD represents a broad base of membership organisations (variety gives strength) 5. The unrestricted membership makes it a flexible structure able to influence in many ways 6. Contains people with adequate knowledge on debt and development and good governance issues 7. Contains people with international lobbying experience 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No clear strategic plan 2. Inadequate internal communication and feedback 3. Inability to network with members 4. No proper channels to communicate with the grass roots level 5. Weak internalisation of TCDD commitments within member organisations 6. Flexibility is affected by discontinuity of representatives from member organisations 7. The lack of permanent staff affects timely and accountable responses 8. No reliable funding 9. The coalition undermines the capacity building of member organisations 10. Limited publicity about TCDD activities
Opportunities	Threats
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Political stability promotes participation 2. Good relationship with all stakeholders including Govt and donors 3. The PRSP process has created a space for CSOs to influence national issues 4. The PRSP document makes it clear how CSOs can monitor and evaluate implementation 5. Ability to lobby and campaign can be increased through international networking 6. National and global agendas on poverty eradication can boost the coalition spirit 7. TCDD provides an umbrella under which CSOs can organise 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Government might treat contributions tokenistically 2. Lack of grass roots recognition 3. Interference by donors 4. Donor breach of agreements (eg funding) 5. Donors unwilling to give support 6. Lack of trust amongst members 7. Some members tend to act individually 8. Conflict of interest between coalition and member's own agendas 9. The speed at which the TAS/PRSP process is moving 10. Danger of being spread too thinly

Activity 2: identifying core values

1. to promote equal partnerships for action in a collaborative environment
2. to promote information dissemination, feedback and effective coordination
3. to internalise TCDD goals and priorities into the activities of member organisations

Activity 3: identifying capacity building needs

The Secretariat and members between them need to ensure that they can:

1. define clear roles and tasks for effective coalition (leadership, management and administration)
2. promote active membership of the coalition
3. generate and disseminate information
4. engage in research to monitor the impact of poverty reduction measures
5. provide feedback which is timely and accurate
6. promote broad based public awareness on debt and development issues

Those who do not learn from the mistakes of history are condemned to repeat them.

Organisation Life Cycle in the Third Sector

Source: Mike Hudson (1999) *Managing without profit – the art of managing third-sector organisations*; Penguin

Organisations have a life cycle which they pass through in stages. Developing from one stage to the next is often a time of revolution and stress. Thinking in this way helps Board members and staff to put the opportunities and issues they face in a broader context. It helps people to understand that their problems are not unique

and insoluble. It lets people explain behaviour in terms of a model. This makes it easier to identify the actions which are needed to move the organisation to its next stage of development.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cause is well established • Older staff • Less entrepreneurial • Highly experienced • Risk of being taken over by other organisations 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many New Staff • New Leadership • Attempts to systemize • Difficulty distinguishing good management and unnecessary bureaucracy • Confusion between consensus and consultation • Board/staff roles muddled 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong Leadership • Strategically managed • Board governs • Managers manage • Systems established • Professional people management • Clear reporting and accountability 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs change • Membership and donations fall • Harder to attract quality staff • Board members resign • New purpose needed to allow rejuvenation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominated by Founders • Run off adrenaline • Few systems • Informal structure • Consensus management style 				
birth	youth	adulthood	maturity	decline

Many organisations which are committed to change and development are often conservative when it comes to changing themselves. Sometimes people who have been with the organisation for a long time find it difficult to see new ways of structuring it. In other situations people who are committed to the cause cannot find the time to deal with restructuring the organisation.

This means that many organisations are operating with systems that are long past their 'use-by' date eg as an organisation gets bigger consensus-style management (where everyone has a say in everything) becomes unworkable and so does the idea that one person can co-ordinate every activity.

Towards a formal structure for the NGO Policy Group

CSO's begin life when a small group of people gets together to share concerns and ideas. Several small groups may join together in a loose way so that there is the beginning of an informal social movement. This might be effective in changing what the influential people think and do.

But it is difficult for informal groups of volunteers to keep going over long periods of time if they have to tackle complex problems. As the size of the group and the task increases the CSO has to 'formalise' and take on paid staff (possibly part time in the first instance).

The formalising process can be complicated. The following list is not complete but gives a flavour of the types of Attitudes, Knowledge and Skills (ASK) that the CSO will have to find or develop:

Managing money and things

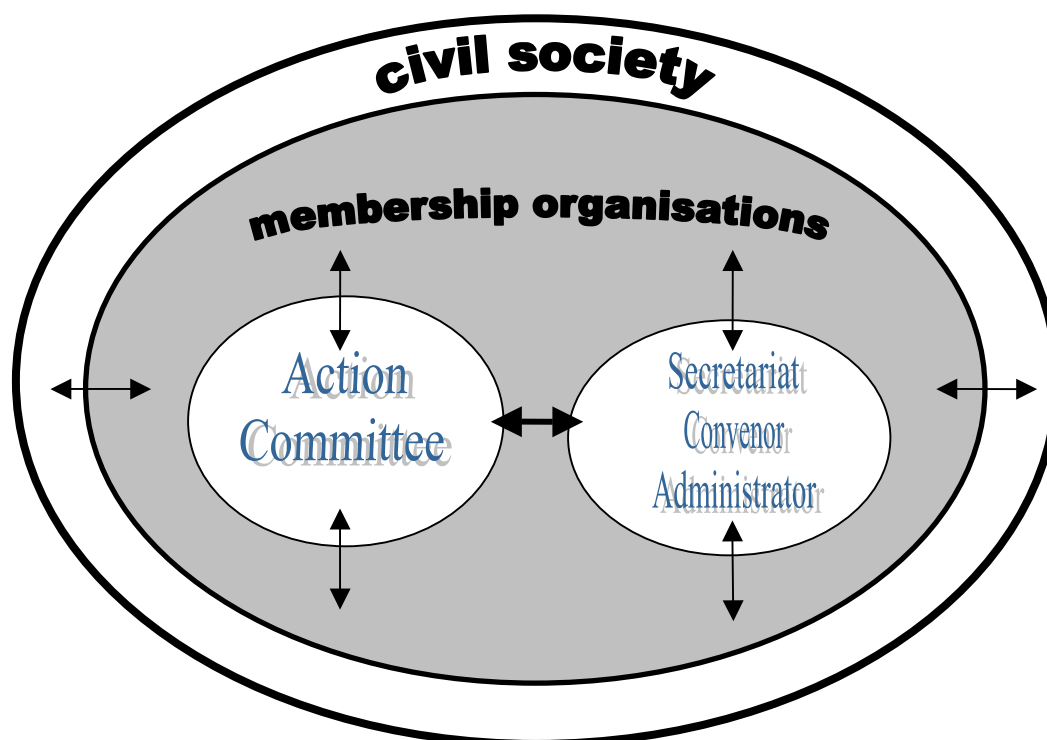
- Types of constitutions for CSOs?
- Pros and cons of charitable status and tax exemption?
- Opening a bank account?
- Terms of Reference (ToR) and conditions of service for paid staff?
- Budgeting, book-keeping and accounting
- Fund raising & financial sustainability
- Recording and reporting systems
- Management of buildings and equipment

Managing people and ideas

- Leadership, management and administration
- Working in partnership
- Participatory visioning
- Participatory planning, implementing, monitoring & evaluating
- Lobbying and Advocacy (Influencing Skills)
- Group Dynamics (forming, storming, norming, performing)

Some Structural Options

As we saw earlier, the NGO Policy Group (or Civil Society Policy Group (CiSoPoG)) might be one of three large umbrella organisation sitting under the giant umbrella of the National Body for NGOs (NaBoNGO). The other organisations will deal with registration and with the logistics of mass membership for representational validity. So the key function of the NGO-PG is to build and ensure high quality policy influencing capacity at all levels within civil society.



Not every CSO or NGO is highly committed to policy influencing but those that are will most likely be willing to form more or less formal alliances so as to further particular causes. They might thus become membership organisations of the NGO-PG.

A Board of Directors would be elected from amongst the membership organisations. Having once established the organisation the Board would function mainly strategically (high level policy and fund raising) and calls upon the time of those involved might not thus be too arduous.

Given experiences with other organisations it is probably best that a full time secretariat be established with at least two staff (a director to dream dreams and an administrator to stuff envelops⁴). It is probably best that the secretariat be housed independent of existing NGOs. In the beginning the facilities can be quite modest – basic office equipment with ICT and a generous budget to ensure efficient communication capabilities (phone, photocopying and postage). An allowance can be given for local transport rather than providing a vehicle.

ACTION: NGO-PG steering group to form an action committee to establish the secretariat on a sound human, physical and financial footing. (Or contract out the work?)

⁴ see www.thebpl.co.uk/envelops.htm