Surrogates of the State? Non-Governmental Organisations and Development in Tanzania in the 1960s and 1970s

Dr Michael Jennings
(Centre for Development Studies, Swansea University)

Michael Edwards has suggested that NGOs, particularly southern-based organisations, should be afforded some immunity from the probing interests of researchers, writing: ‘[N]either poor people nor the organisations established to work with them, nor the situations in which they struggle to survive and prosper should be treated as objects for examination by outsiders.’\(^1\) Can he be right in this assertion? Is there something particular to the NGO sector that should exclude it from analysis and possible criticism? The short answer has to be an unequivocal and resounding ‘no’. Today, more than ever, NGOs matter: they have access to large amounts of public revenues; they claim to represent the interests of the poor and marginalised; they are demanding a role in international policy-making; they lay claim to a particular moral stance. Their role in political and public life demands they be accountable, that their inner-workings, decision-making processes and funding allocations face the same levels of public scrutiny as other institutions in the development sector.

This does not have to be a confrontational process. Many NGOs are happy to open themselves up to such scrutiny, through annual reports and financial returns, to granting access to their archives and subjecting their research findings to independent scrutiny. The NGO community appears, overall, to be receptive to the demand for transparency.

If study of the institution of the NGO, and an examination of its practice, is essential, what can an historical analysis add to our understanding of this sector and the current

challenges it faces. I would argue that whilst there exists an abundance of research on the contemporary workings of the NGO, there is little understanding of the processes that have led these organisations to occupy the positions they do today. In this gap, a narrative of a mythical golden age of the NGO has been constructed: a period of independence from governments and hegemonic institutions; when enthusiastic amateurs sought to change the world for the better, undertaking small-scale projects with local villagers across the world, helping people to build for themselves the foundations of a better life. This, the narrative continues, was to be replaced with an increasingly impersonal, bureaucratic model within the major international NGOs, who have become subject to the gravitational pull of those governments and institutions whose orbits they hoped to avoid.

The myth has two variants. Firstly, that of the non-governmental organisation as charity, run by apolitical amateurs and concerned citizens. The second variant portrays these proto-development professionals as the predecessors of the anti-globalisation movement: radical political activists seeking to change the world through small grants and individual projects designed to empower the poor. The common feature to both variants, and a central theme running through much analysis of the NGO sector, is independence. The mythical golden age became tarnished as NGOs and their members were subsumed into a single development discourse in the 1980s. NGOs came increasingly to rely on funds from official sources – government agencies, international organisations, etc – acting as contracted agents for northern donors. Even as international NGOs gained unparalleled access to the corridors and backrooms of power, they became complicit insiders. The space these organisations occupied was transformed from autonomy to dependence.

This mythical narrative is, of course, little more than just that – a constructed past that often bears little relation to reality. It does not speak to the nature of the NGO: its organisation, the impulses and influences that shaped (and continue to shape) its growth, and the constraints that shaped its operations as much as the opportunities. This is the past I am interested in. Moreover, I am interested here less in the emergence of structures and policy at the centre. These have been the subject of many institutional biographies. What is missing in these accounts, however, is an examination of how NGOs were
shaped by the periphery: from the projects and programmes they ran in the field; and through interaction with southern governments, citizens and partners. Through, in other words, the impact of practice and experience.

International NGOs in Tanzania in the 1960s and 1970s

In 1964, a delegate at a conference on the problems of foreign aid in Dar es Salaam warned against some of the dangers of working with voluntary agencies. Organisations seeking to work in Tanzania would probably, he noted ‘sympathise with what we are trying to do’. But, he added, whilst they would make great claims to be offering assistance ‘motivated by a genuine selfless desire to help’, ‘even such voluntary help may have its strings attached.’ He concluded:

The more high-minded agencies might also have trouble bringing themselves to cooperate with less faultless organisations such as government - an attitude which is very outdated in this era of planning.

The concerns reflected both a faith in the power of the modern state, and the wider apprehension over foreign aid and the conditions with which it was frequently attached that was growing in Tanzania.

He need not have worried. Tanzania’s emphasis on participatory development and its Ujamaa ideology attracted a group of liberal-left charitable organisations from Europe, the US and Canada in particular. Non-governmental organisations did not prove to be Trojan Horses in which western imperialist intentions were hidden, nor did they challenge the right of the state to plan development at all levels, to implement those plans, and to control and direct non-state elements participating in those interventions. During

3 Lionel Cliffe, ‘Aid and voluntary agencies’, p.249.
4 Lionel Cliffe, ‘Aid and voluntary agencies’ p.249.
this period, the NGO came to function not as an independent actor, but as another phalanx in the government’s development front. Voluntary agencies willingly became surrogates of the state: acting for it and assisting it in its plans not only to develop the nation, but in the massive reorganisation of social and economic systems and structures, and political power, that accompanied that effort.

It was, admittedly, a small sector, arguably insignificant in terms of the total expenditure it controlled. In just over 25 years in the country, Oxfam had funded grants worth a total of $17.5m in today’s value (£2.25m in 1982). In contrast, total bi-lateral aid in the first five years of independence totalled, in today’s currency, $40m ($3.5 in 1965). Official donors were the real financial powerhouses behind development in Tanzania.

Nevertheless, NGOs played a role that belied their size. The participation of these agencies, albeit limited, small-scale and patchy, assisted the extension of government authority into distant rural areas under the guise of non-official development programmes. By undertaking projects designed to promote communal production or communal living, or promoting particular types of cultivation practice, the underlying concepts of Tanzanian development policy were transmitted to peripheral areas. NGOs further acted as powerful advocates for the government’s cause, both within Tanzania and (perhaps more importantly), in their home countries. The lack of criticism over certain practices and policies in Tanzania at this time (similar policies, in some cases, to those criticised by these same organisations in other countries at a later date), served to protect the Tanzanian government from scrutiny over its implementation strategy. The actions of NGOs, in supporting official policy, served to narrow the opportunities for independent action and thus reinforced the official paradigm.

The importance of the NGO sector lay in the fact that it shared to a great extent the perspective of the Tanzanian state. Criticism was muted at best, and tinged with a faith

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5 Oxfam, *Oxfam and Tanzania*, publicity literature (Oxfam, September 1982).
that isolated problems would ultimately be resolved: a Panglossian faith that all would be for the best in the end. The NGO critique of Tanzania identified problems in development policy as technical or the result of poor implementation: there was no attempt to question the underlying foundations of this policy. As Tanzania became increasingly autocratic, rather than begin a process of gradual withdrawal, NGOs seemingly shifted to an ever closer identification with that state. Without recourse to legislative or coercive measures, the state was able to forge a broad development consensus that encompassed the NGO community operating in the country.

By the mid-1970s, the autocratic and coercive nature of the rural development programme was hard to ignore. Ujamaa villagisation, the effort to transform the Tanzanian rural sector through the creation of nucleated settlements in which people worked on communal farms, was adopted as policy in 1967. Initially, rural dwellers would be encouraged to voluntarily establish these new villages. However, slow progress led to increased government intervention. In 1969, the ‘frontal approach’ was adopted – government officers were called upon to be more pro-active in encouraging people, and government-led ‘Operations’ were carried across the country. In 1973, the government announced villagisation was to be compulsory. In the space of just 10 years, over 6 million people were physically re-located in new villages across Tanzania in one of Africa’s largest resettlement campaigns. Accompanying this shift towards compulsory villagisation was a noticeable move away from the ideological foundations of that policy. By the early 1970s it had ceased to be imbued with the spirit of rural socialism, but had become a policy of establishing central government control. Civil society organisations were increasingly co-opted or abolished from the late 1960s. Party and government structures were established down to the level of the household, reinforced in 1972 by the Decentralisation Policy which, contrary to its name, saw a massive centralisation of power in the hands of the government. Marketing boards, pricing policies and bye-laws established controls over the economic life of the rural population. Villagisation had become a means for shifting the state towards authoritarianism. And it was during this period that many NGOs sought to more closely identify themselves with the Tanzanian state and its objectives. How had this come about?
Oxfam and Ujamaa

Oxfam was one of the most important of NGOs working in Tanzania in this period. The organisation was one of the best informed, both by virtue of having a presence in the country, and due to the close links between the Field Director in the 1960s, and key members of the Tanzanian government (including Nyerere himself). The level of analysis of Tanzanian politics, development policy and day-to-day events held by Oxfam was high – possibly better than most other contemporaneous agencies. Perhaps this might make the process by which Oxfam became a surrogate of the state harder to comprehend: if it could see what was going on, if it possessed such a high level of knowledge and analytical capacity, how could it subscribe so fully to a programme that was in reality undermining the very things Oxfam stood for?

Oxfam had first become involved with Tanzania in 1955, providing a grant of £100 for the purchase of vitamin tablets for drought victims in Dodoma region. From these beginnings, by the mid-1970s, Tanzania had come to represent for Oxfam the ideal nation in which to be working. It was, in the eyes of the field director: ‘one of the very few countries in the world which is systematically trying to put into practice the sort of policies Oxfam ties to sell throughout’. Tanzania had become, in the words of another member of staff: ‘Almost an Oxfam in itself’.

This remarkable transition from providing ad-hoc grants for small projects across the country, to a complete and utter identification with what it believed the Tanzanian government was trying to achieve, occurred at a time when the government was shifting towards an ever more authoritarian position. In other words, as Oxfam increasingly saw the government as attempting to instil socialist, egalitarian, equitable, and democratic development, that same government was in reality moving ever further away from those goals. How did an organisation with people on the ground, people actively involved in

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8 Field Director M to Harris, 27 August 1975. OxA Tan 64.
Tanzanian national development, fail to see the ever widening gap between the rhetoric and the reality? The answer lies in the seductive power of Ujamaa ideology.

During the 1960s, Oxfam had become involved in supporting the Ruvuma Development Association (RDA). This loose union of 17 villages in southwest Tanzania, had been established in 1961 as an attempt to put Nyerere’s emerging philosophy of Ujamaa into practice. Each settlement was built around the principle of communal living and communal working, dedicated to equality and equity, and the Association as a whole was run on democratic and participatory lines. For Oxfam, it was a truly ‘revolutionary’ model, and came to serve as the means through which the organisation defined Ujamaa in practice. Throughout the 1970s, whenever Oxfam declared its support for Ujamaa policy, it was referring to the model as practiced by the Ruvuma Development Association. The notion that community participation and communal production were the lynchpins of Ujamaa had become so firmly embedded in Oxfam’s discourse, that even when the Association was forcibly disbanded by the state in 1969, and government policy shifted noticeably away from these concepts, Oxfam clung to this definition.

By 1967, Oxfam’s support for the RDA had given it an additional reason for committing so fully to Ujamaa. During the debates in the lead up to the publication of the Arusha Declaration, which turned a vague philosophy from the writings and speeches of the President into actual government policy, the supporters of the RDA-model were critical in pushing the case for Ujamaa villagisation. Amongst this group was Oxfam’s field director, Jimmy Betts, who was responsible for drafting the final report of a 1966 meeting convened to consider the future of rural development policy. Sadly, I have found no record of the report. But it is clear from other documents that Betts was actively advocating for the adoption of Ujamaa and the Association model. The Arusha Declaration represented, in Oxfam’s eyes, a critical victory. It appeared that the government was now as committed to these principles of development as the NGO was.10

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10 For a fuller account of Oxfam’s involvement with the RDA, and Betts’ role in advocating this model, see Michael Jennings, ‘Almost an Oxfam in Itself’: Oxfam and Development in Tanzania in the 1960s and 70s’, *African Affairs*, (2002), 101, pp.509-530
The Association was important, in other words, not just because it stood as an example of all that Oxfam as an organisation wanted to be doing, but because it was what Oxfam was doing in the 1960s. It signalled to the NGO that the government was also committed to these ideals. Moreover, believing it had played a role in securing the adoption of Ujamaa as official policy, Oxfam felt it was now a stakeholder in its success. From 1967, Oxfam was utterly committed to the idea of Ujamaa and villagisation, and would do all it could to support and promote its implementation.

Some authors have suggested that NGOs in Tanzania were incorporated by the state, in the way civil society organisations had been, and forced to conform to its dominance.\(^\text{11}\) I would suggest that such factors played at best a limited role in constricting the activities of NGOs. For much of the period, there was little legislation governing the activities of NGOs as a group. Most NGOs were registered under one of two acts: the Society Ordinance of 1954; and the National Sports Council of Tanzania Act of 1967. The Society Ordinance gave the Registrar power to refuse or cancel registration, order the provision of information or audited accounts, and enter and search meeting places. Registration could be refused if it was considered that a society would be prejudicial to the maintenance of order or good government. Decisions of the Registrar could not be challenged in the courts, and no reasons for decisions needed to be provided. The President was also empowered to declare a society unlawful at his discretion in matters of ‘public interest’.\(^\text{12}\) But these acts were largely designed for indigenous societies, holding limited relevance to relationships with foreign NGOs.

The only controls imposed upon this sector were a limited range of regulatory powers placed in the Prime Minister’s Office. NGOs were required to report to the PMO before working within the districts. The PMO’s ultimate assent for a project, if it involved


working with a government office, was required, but was rarely refused.\textsuperscript{13} Besides, many projects were run in conjunction with voluntary agencies, in particular Church organisations. In 1977, the regulations were tightened up, and the PMO re-iterated the necessity for NGOs to work through it.\textsuperscript{14} But again, there appears to have been few attempts to prevent NGOs from operating in specific areas or activities. The mechanisms for enforcing compliance from the international NGO community were, then, limited.

Yet despite these ambiguities in the relationship between state and the NGO-community, and despite a lack of a meaningful instrument for exercising control, the NGOs operating in Tanzania did not need such controls to force them to became partners in the implementation of the Tanzanian development model. As the case of Oxfam shows, NGO activity in the 1970s played this role with little encouragement from the state.

Following the collapse of the Ruvuma Development Association, Oxfam received assurances from the government that Ujamaa was ‘still firmly the official policy’ of Tanzania.\textsuperscript{15} In 1972, the Oxfam field director described Tanzanian development policy as ‘surely one of the most hopeful Third World experiments in development’.\textsuperscript{16} The report continued: ‘the Ujamaa programme appears as the real example of grass-roots development ... It has great appeal to those of us who are idealists’.\textsuperscript{17} Far from being forcibly co-opted, Oxfam was willingly, and happily, choosing to support the establishment of Ujamaa. The field director concluded:

\begin{quote}
Could [Oxfam] do anything useful within [the Ujamaa set-up]? Perhaps; Ujamaa villages, each affecting some 2,000 people, are in fact mini-integrated development programmes, with plans drawn up...by local development officials,
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\textsuperscript{13} An Oxfam project for a Village Councils training programme was endorsed by the Prime Minister’s Office, despite concern within the PMO that it held no control over the project: ‘The PMO is always in a difficult position; the official policy is decentralisation, but the PMO’s job is to coordinate everything. It is thus understandably a bit schizophrenic’. Field Director M, project assessment, 20 April 1977. OxA Tan 96.
\textsuperscript{14} Oxfam Field Officer (OFO) S to OAD, 23 January 1979. OxA Tan 64.
\textsuperscript{15} OFO H, Report on visit to Tanzania, March 1970. OxA OG 4A.
\textsuperscript{16} Field Director M, ‘The Sound of Gold’, 4-5 August 1972, pp.3-4. OxA Tan 64.
\textsuperscript{17} OFO G, cited in Field Director M, ‘The Sound of Gold’, 4-5 August 1972, p.3. OxA Tan 64.
and modified in the light of discussions with the villagers. The development officials are short of money and equipment...\textsuperscript{18}

Oxfam should support these efforts, and direct its grants and project support to Ujamaa villagisation.

By the mid-1970s, Oxfam had more clearly identified how it might best participate and support Ujamaa Villagisation. ‘Village-based’ projects would strengthen the Ujamaa system ‘both philosophically and practically’: philosophically because equality would be promoted through the communal ownership and production elements; and practically by ensuring a greater degree of popular participation in development. ‘Area-based’ projects (such as funding training schemes or a mobile health clinic) did not necessarily ‘benefit the Ujamaa system so directly’, but Oxfam believed they would serve to ‘reinforce it’.\textsuperscript{19}

Oxfam during this period was deliberately supporting and designing projects that would promote the ideological components of the Villagisation policy. Whilst the NGO might not have been participating in the actual movement of people, it was helping to create a space in which that movement could take place. Oxfam was serving the villagisation programme at three levels. Firstly, it provided funds that were implicitly linked to implementation of resettlement and villagisation. It targeted aid at the new villages, thereby excluding those who wished to exist outside the official system. Secondly, it sought to strengthen village government, even as these institutions were being subordinated to the power of the state. Thirdly, Oxfam was channelling funds through agencies that had close relationships with the state, or were actual state agencies. In doing so, it was further reducing the space in which dissent or opposition could emerge. On an admittedly small, but nevertheless important, scale, Oxfam was becoming in effect a quasi-official agency in development, one more cog in the vast machine imposing its will upon the rural sector. Its actions served to make Ujamaa villagisation an irresistible force.

\textsuperscript{18} Field Director M, ‘The Sound of Gold’, 4-5 August 1972, pp.5. OxA Tan 64.
\textsuperscript{19} Field Director M, ‘Everyone Has to be Good’, April 1974, p.4-5. OxA Tan 64.
This is not to suggest, of course, that Oxfam was deliberately seeking to increase the power of the state over the rural sector, to reduce the power of villages and village members to contribute to their own development, or to assist in the imposition of an increasingly autocratic regime. Far from it. Oxfam was determined to promote the opposite, and believed it was doing this. Yet the underlying logic of projects and programmes it supported in Tanzania nevertheless served those ends.

Between 1969 and 1979, Oxfam made grants totalling more than £170,000 for water projects with the CDTF. Almost all of the 650 wells constructed with Oxfam funding between 1969 and 1974 were sited in an Ujamaa village (or a village in the process of being established). 20 Oxfam-supported water projects in Lindi Region were deliberately designed to fit in with the ongoing Operations in those districts to forcibly re-settle people in 1975. Oxfam wrote of its reasons for providing a grant: ‘the most basic need in planned villagisation [is] ultimately water development. It is therefore hoped to target [these] areas’. 21

To a large extent, water supply projects were by default linked to the villagisation process: new water supplies were always going to be provided in nucleated settlements, and Oxfam was unlikely to have not funded the provision of such a basic necessity. Moreover, it had little real control over where those supply points were situated, so thoroughly had the state exerted control over the planning and implementation phases. Nevertheless, as Oxfam statements made clear, it did support the wider aims of government development policy, and its funding of such schemes was never purely pragmatic. As it noted in Lindi Region, support was being deliberately targeted on those who accepted the government policy: ‘These people were selected only because they are participating in the planned villagisation project of the Region.’ 22 The politics of water provision in Tanzania was not

20 OFO S to Oxfam Africa Desk (OAD), 15 October 1974. OxA Tan 6c, vol II.
21 Grant application, 1974, pp.1-3. OxA Tan 6c, vol II. My emphasis.
22 Grant application, 1974, pp.1-3. OxA Tan 6c, vol II. My emphasis. This strategy of directing development assistance to those who supported the state in its efforts bears striking similarly to the Focal Point approach adopted in colonial Tanganyika from around 1956, and the ‘transformation’ approach of early post-colonial development.
just about providing clean water for domestic and productive uses. It was also being used as an incentive to command compliance with the implementation of state policy.\textsuperscript{23}

If funding for service projects such as water supplies was implicitly linked into support for villagisation, the use of block grants and integrated development schemes by Oxfam were more explicit in their aims. In such schemes, Oxfam was directly funding government agencies in the support of villagisation campaigns. The Oxfam-funded Chunya Integrated Development Programme was designed to run alongside the 1972 Operation Chunya, the government attempt to enforce villagisation.\textsuperscript{24} Similarly, a block grant for a number of schemes in Kigoma district was intended to support the newly established villages. Under the functioning of these programmes, Oxfam ceded control over selection of schemes, running of the programme, and ultimate objectives, to the implementing agency – the local government.\textsuperscript{25} Oxfam saw such grants as contributing to both capacity building (at village and local government level), as well as directly contributing to the resettlement efforts of the state.

By the 1970s, Oxfam was deliberately designing its Tanzanian development programme to support Ujamaa and villagisation. One of the key criteria in project selection was whether a particular scheme helped promote Tanzanian socialism. In 1975, one member of the NGO wrote: ‘if any country were to be labelled ‘ideal’ for Oxfam’s work in terms of basic philosophy, I suppose Tanzania would come closest’.\textsuperscript{26} Another staff member declared ‘Tanzanian philosophy is Oxfam philosophy’.

\textsuperscript{23} Gerhard Tschannerl, ‘Rural water supply in Tanzania: is politics or technique in command?’, in Coulson (ed) \textit{African Socialism in Practice. The Tanzanian Experience}, (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1979), p.87.

\textsuperscript{24} For a detailed analysis of the Chunya Integrated Development Scheme, and its importance in shaping Oxfam policy in Tanzania, see Michael Jennings, ‘Development is Very Political in Tanzania: Oxfam and the Chunya Integrated Development Programme, 1972-6’ in Ondine Barrow and Michael Jennings (eds), \textit{The Charitable Impulse: NGOs in North East and East Africa} (James Currey, November 2001) pp.109-32.


\textsuperscript{26} Oxfam to CRS, 18 February 1975, OxA Tan 80 v.1; Field Staff to Oxford, 28 September 1975. OxA Tan 64.
The importance of Ujamaa went far beyond the national boundaries of Tanzania. For the Oxfam Field Director success in Tanzania was critical for the prospects of the poor across the world.

If they are successful, the case for a workable, juster [sic], society in Africa will be strengthened. And if they aren’t, it will be weakened. So it seems to me that it would be worth giving a very big priority to helping development. …perhaps with more money, perhaps with more staff.27

Tanzanian development was an experiment in social planning and intervention in rural life that could be applied, if successful, to the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, if not the developing world. Oxfam, it seems, was resting almost all its hopes on events in Nyerere’s Tanzania, and identified completely with what they thought he was trying to achieve. Oxfam had fully signed up to the Tanzanian development policy, and the ideology fed into its notion of what it was as an organisation. Seduced by the rhetoric of Ujamaa, Oxfam had become blind to the realities of Tanzanian politics by the 1970s. It had become bound to Tanzania through chains of its own forging

**Christian Aid and Ujamaa**

Dean McHenry has suggested that the early eagerness of non-governmental groups participating in Villagisation was increasingly replaced by reticence as the programme became marked by compulsion and forced resettlement. The example of Oxfam, at least, does not bear this out. It was aware of some of the problems involved with implementing the programme, but nevertheless chose to maintain, and increase, the level of its support for Tanzanian development policy. It was not alone in its experiences or its response. Christian Aid, another British NGO, was clearly aware of the use of violence in the villagisation programme by the mid-1970s. One report noted:

27 Field Director M, ‘Everyone Has to be Good’, April 1974, p.2. OxA Tan 64.
Stories are told of peasant huts being set on fire by the military. Doctors and nurses make no secret of the casualties they had to deal with, including burnt babies, forgotten by terrified mothers, who ran screaming out of huts set on fire. Whether huts were fired without warning or the people had not understood the warnings is not clear.  

The report continued with further criticisms of the implementation of the programme:

The most serious consequence of all this is a lack of food, as a result of which Tanzania is facing famine...No provision was made for them [the peasantry] in the “new villages”...The Government has yet to provide them with the promised water...

Another report by the Christian Aid Projects Officer similarly noted the willingness of the state to use force to achieve its ends. She wrote of ‘a number of instances of unnecessary force being used’ including the ‘burning of houses’.

Yet despite the acknowledgement of compulsion and implementation failures in the government’s development strategy, the report called for what was in effect a closer relationship with the state. It hoped to use the Tanzanian agency – the Community Development Trust Fund (CDTF) – as a channel for Christian Aid grants to support official development schemes. Whilst the CDTF marketed itself as a Tanzanian NGO, it was, at best, a quasi-NGO: its role was to source funds for government-run development programmes. Christian Aid was aware of this relationship, writing of the organisation: ‘The CDTF exist [sic] to find funds from voluntary agency sources for village projects which are recommended through Government. Application forms are completed by Village Committees and then must receive the endorsement of district and regional Tanu

30 Christian Aid Project Officer (CAPO), ‘Report on Field Trip to Tanzania’, November 1975, p.2. CA2/A/26/7
Providing funding to the CDTF was, in effect, to directly support state development policy. Indeed, for many donors, including Oxfam who had an especially close relationship with the CDTF, this was its main attraction. By choosing to work through this organisation, Christian Aid was increasing its ideological commitment to Ujamaa and villagisation. As the Projects Officer explained: ‘It would be an opportunity for Christian Aid to fund real village level projects and CDTF provide the most hopeful opportunity of doing this.’ As the Tanzania state become ever more repressive, ever more willing to use force to achieve its objectives, Christian Aid willingly chose to become further embedded in the system.

Was Christian Aid’s subjugation to the state based on similar processes to that of Oxfam? The structural organisation of Christian Aid did impose particular constraints in its actions. As a non-operational organisation, Christian Aid did not initiate project proposals. Rather it relied to a large extent on the objectives and principles of its partner agencies. The main partner of Christian Aid – the Christian Council of Tanzania (CCT) – had by the mid-1960s firmly allied itself to government policy. Inevitably the CCT’s support for official development policy determined what projects were selected and put forward for external funding. Christian Aid was consequently trapped in a process over which it had little control. An operational structure that was designed to enable meaningful contact with local partners in order to allow the voices of the grass-roots to be heard more clearly, in effect strengthened the voice of the state.

Christian Aid did not support villagisation and Ujamaa simply by default, however. Its non-operational status did not mean it had no control over where its money went. It decided which countries and which partners to work with; it evaluated the success or otherwise of schemes it supported, determining future funding decisions; and it ensured it was informed about political processes in the countries in which it operated. In the mid-

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1970s, far from being concerned that its main partner, the CCT, was too close to the government, Christian Aid suggested that it was too distant.\textsuperscript{33}

To some extent, it was driven by a sense of pragmatism in its response by the mid-1970s. Having supported Ujamaa through the 1960s and early 1970s, it believed that negative aspects of implementation would be resolved once the process was complete. Mistakes were ascribed to ‘overzealous officials’\textsuperscript{34}, and besides, what was important was the end result. One report concluded:

\begin{quote}
The scene has been set for a much more comfortable life than the average African has ever known before. I have talked to a number of women from expanded villages; they told me what a blessing it was ... Whatever the mistakes of 1974, in eight to ten years time all the new villages will have the promised amenities, and this should increase considerably agricultural production.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

This was a common reaction amongst NGO workers. An Oxfam officer argued with similar sentiments in 1973: ‘I realise that one could argue very cogently in favour of a quite different strategy of development for rural Tanzania, but since this is the one they have chosen then I feel that if we are going to help we [s]hould try to do so in the spirit of Tanzanian socialism’.\textsuperscript{36} NGOs were often critical of the way Villagisation had been implemented (especially Oxfam with its very close perspective on what was going on). But despite these reservations the policy itself was seen as potentially bringing significant gains. Villagisation, for most of these organisations, represented the best hope for the rural poor of Tanzania.\textsuperscript{37}

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\textsuperscript{33} CAPO, ‘Report’, p.1. CA2/A/26/7.
\textsuperscript{34} CAPO, ‘Report’, p.2. CA2/A/26/7.
\textsuperscript{36} OFO to OAD, 6 February 1973. OxA Tan 69.
\textsuperscript{37} Of course, one might put such views into the wider history of resettlement and the establishment of new villages in development discourse. Resettlement as part of sleeping sickness campaigns in the 1920s and 1930s were also intended to have developmental gains. And how different is the concept of the Millennium Development Village from earlier conceptions of the modernising effects of the scientifically-planned village?\end{footnotes}
But the response of NGOs like Christian Aid to villagisation was not just a matter of operational constraints and pragmatism. Like Oxfam, they too had a profound and real commitment to the ideas and principles of Ujamaa. Christian Aid saw the roots of poverty lying not in economic insecurity, but ‘an unjust social and economic order…. To deal with the root of the problem, that imbalance must be rectified.\footnote{A Brash, ‘BCC Policy Statement’, 23 October 1968, p.2. CA2/1/46/3.} Christian Aid believed that Villagisation was part of that effort to restore the balance. By grouping people in small communities, the organisation believed, they could be given more control and power. Villagisation, with its stress on village democracy and grass-roots decision-making, seemed the perfect solution - the incarnation of the Christian Aid ideal. A project established by an American NGO, Catholic Relief Services, in 1973, to provide support for schools in the new villages, similarly sought to reinforce the principles of Ujamaa, over and above other priorities. Schools were identified by the organisation as a vital means for inculcating Ujamaa ideals: self-reliance, transfer of technical skills and promotion of community spirit.\footnote{Oxfam Evaluation Report, October 1976. OxA Tan 80, v.II.} A report in 1975 declared this project’s aims to be ‘to assist the government plans for … Rural Village Development’.\footnote{CRS Project Officer, Progress Report, 1975. Tan 80 v.I.} Foreign NGOs were committed not just to the notion of development in Tanzania, but to the particular and highly politicised developmental vision of its government.

As with other NGOs, Christian Aid was being influenced by wider shifts in the politicisation of aid and poverty. Oxfam had undertaken this transition in the 1960s, willingly embracing the political nature of development (it wrote to one partner in 1977: ‘development is very political in Tanzania … anyone not prepared to accept that … probably shouldn’t be in Oxfam, and certainly shouldn’t be in Tanzania’\footnote{Oxfam-UK to Oxfam-America, 3 August 1977. OxA Tan 6g.}). After a tentative shift in the late 1960s\footnote{A Brash, ‘BCC Policy Statement’, 23 October 1968, p.2. CA2/1/46/3.}, by the mid-1970s, CA was more willing to embrace a greater political involvement in poverty. The Swanwick conference of 1974 called for ‘deeper political involvement’ on the part of Church members, and thus implicitly those
involved in overseas development activities. Although principally intended as a code for action in the metropolitan arena, it had an impact on the wider development work. Where a government seemed to talk the same language of politicised poverty and uprooting the social order, it inevitably seemed attractive.

Such attitudes informed the activity of Christian Aid in Tanzanian development throughout the period, and partly explain the shift towards the state in the mid-1970s. Having committed itself to the principle of village-level, community development, it was willing to accept it must indirectly support (or at least tolerate) inducement strategies to achieve those aims. By 1975, with nearly seventy percent of the population in official villages, and the rest soon to follow, Christian Aid felt that the stage had been set where it could effectively put into motion the type of development it wanted to see. Ironically, Ujamaa villagisation was about to collapse as a policy.

**Conclusion**

To return to the mythical narrative of the NGO outlined at the start: what does the story of the NGO in Tanzania tell us about the institution of the NGO? In this era of good governance, we are used to the NGO functioning in a way that actively seeks to undermine the hegemony of the state: promoting civil society voices; working with opposition groups; challenging governments, their policies, and encouraging greater openness. Many analysts have suggested the key challenge facing NGOs is whether they can retain this independence from the state. Paul Streeton, for example, has asked whether NGOs ‘can maintain their independence as a third sector and resist becoming either agents of government or fee-charging private consultancy firms’. Ian Smillie similarly suggests that: ‘despite frequently repeated assurances that NGO independence is

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reasonably intact … most northern NGOs have stumbled into a contracting era without appearing to have noticed it.\(^{45}\)

My argument with such perspectives is not over whether or not northern NGOs have become contracted agents, but with the assumption that underlies such claims: that NGOs have ever been truly autonomous actors. The era before the 1980s was not a golden age of independence for the modern NGO sector. They may not have been subject to the power of donors in the way that they have become over the past two decades, but their freedom to operate was limited by constraints of a different sort. The shift has been from reliance upon one type of state to another, reflecting the huge shift in the balance of power over development processes that has taken place over the same period. NGOs are subject to international development discourses which ultimately shape the nature of their being. One effect of this discourse before the shifts in the 1980s was to secure for the NGO sector a degree of independence from donor governments and international organisations, but not ‘freedom’ from all constraints as is sometimes posited. In the 1960s and 1970s, good governance meant strong governance. The aim for many NGOs was not to undermine state hegemony, but to support it, or encourage regimes to accept their responsibilities where they were seen to be failing.

In other words, NGOs inevitably supported states through their own programmes, because states were responsible for development. But this in itself did not bind NGOs to individual governments, for these institutions could choose where to set up programmes, and with which governments they wished to work with. It does not explain why Oxfam not only supported Tanzanian development, but saw in the government a mirror image of itself. NGOs chose to support the Tanzanian state in the way that they did because they identified with the development ideology of Ujamaa.

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As part of the Chunya Integrated Development Programme, Oxfam funded a project to promote the use of communally-owned oxen in agricultural production. The field director noted in a 1976 evaluation:

Almost all the comments refer to the technical, physical aspects of the oxen. These are certainly important; if they don’t work physically, they don’t work at all. But a major element in this proposal is the social and political side; the redistribution of productive assets, the reduction of inequality, the beginnings of working together with shared assets, the 10-cell as the unit of production … My point is that the justification of this scheme does not rest solely on its ability to produce more crops. We hope it will eventually – but one could probably justify it even if it only produced the same as before.46

Increasing production levels and income had become a secondary, if still desirable target. For Oxfam, this project was first and foremost an exercise in social engineering. Through the promotion of communally-owned assets, it hoped to entrench Ujamaa ideals in the new settlements. It was explicitly political in its objectives.

But in being political, it was serving to entrench the increasing authoritarianism of the Tanzanian state. One could perhaps argue that NGOs were forced, by default, into supporting Ujamaa and the policies of the Tanzanian government: they wished to assist projects that happened to be set in Ujamaa villages; that few alternative avenues to participating with government agencies existed. Or perhaps NGOs were well-intentioned, but mislead about the realities of Tanzanian governance. In some cases, this might be true. However, many foreign NGOs made their decisions willingly. They were not ignorant or naïve, blind to the realities of Tanzanian politics and its effects on the rural areas. The objectives of many of these organisations were deliberately fashioned to provide support to Ujamaa. The NGO sector, part of the broader international liberal-left for whom Ujamaa seemed a panacea to an increasingly imbalanced, unjust world, had become by the late 1960s and early 1970s a self-perceived stakeholder in its success. Success for

46 Field Director M to Oxfam-UK, 10 July 1976. OxA Tan 64c.
Ujamaa in Tanzania was success for themselves. It was such perceptions that kept the NGOs tied into the state developmental model during its worst excesses of the mid- to late-1970s.

James Ferguson has described development agencies as ‘anti-politics machines’, deliberately excluding the political, and reducing development to the technical. The result, he suggests, is to turn development processes into covert ‘political operations’. But in the case of Oxfam in particular, a highly politicised sense of purpose appears to have led to the same outcome. In acting as a ‘politics machine’, in subordinating the technical to the socio-political, it played a supporting role in the massive extension of state power. Certainly any attempt to understand poverty without understanding its political nature is deeply flawed. But as the example of Tanzania in this period shows political tunnel vision can carry its own dangers.

The importance of Ujamaa ideology to the organisation, led Oxfam to interpret Tanzanian development policy through the rhetorical prism of Ujamaa. The Arusha Declaration was internally translated in reference to the commitment of Oxfam staff (both in Oxford and in the field) to principles of equality, equity and socialism. It appeared to confirm what the NGO already knew: if poverty was the result of political factors – exploitative relations of production and exchange, the dominance of the urban / industrial complex, social inequality – then development policy must address those factors. As long as the Tanzanian state retained its rhetorical commitment to Ujamaa, Oxfam and other NGOs would maintain their commitment to Tanzania. The northern NGO sector in Tanzania ultimately failed to distinguish the rhetoric from the reality, between the cause and effect of their role, and thus served to promote and support systems of control and dominance that went against everything they claimed to stand for.

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