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NGO Visions of Development in the Changing Contexts of Ethiopia. 1960s-2015

Aychebrew Hadera Hailu

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WORKING PAPERS**

**NGO Visions of
Development in the
Changing Contexts of
Ethiopia: 1960s-2015**

Aychebrew Hadera Hailu, 2018

Bayreuth African Studies Working Papers

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NGO Visions of Development in the Changing Contexts of Ethiopia: 1960s-2015

Aychebrew Hadera Hailu

Abstract

Since the early 1960s, many Non-Governmental Organizations (from now on NGOs) in Ethiopia, as in other parts of the Third World, have aspired to alleviate poverty. Others have envisaged a situation where communities enjoy the full spectrum of human rights. These visions of development are not too distant from those of various forms of government in Ethiopia during this period, although official discourses on human rights are only a recent phenomenon. However, there have always been clear differences between governmental actors and NGOs on the one hand, and between different NGOs among themselves, on the other, with regard to their strategic preferences on how to achieve development. The paper traces visions as well as strategies of NGOs in their changing historical contexts, shaped by dominant actors such as the state. It investigates the divergence and convergence of visions between various actors over time as well as the strategic shifts resulting from changes in the context. Thus, the paper's contribution lies in its approach to treat development visions in a more inclusive way. The paper is concerned not only

with the in/capacity of NGO to formulate development visions, but also the willingness and commitment of state actors to allow a degree of public space for NGO operation. The study uses data generated from various oral and written primary and secondary sources collected by the contributor during two rounds of fieldwork in Ethiopia.

1 Defining development and NGOs

Development has always been a contested term. It is used by its advocates to mean positive progress, organic growth and evolution (Lewis / Kanji 2009: 49). The same advocates also argue that development refers to a process of making a better life for everyone (Peet / Hartwick 2009: 1). A better life means meeting basic needs: namely sufficient food to maintain good health, a safe, healthy place in which to live, affordable services available to everyone and being treated with dignity and respect (Ibid.: 1).

Development in the sense of making life better for everyone is a powerful ideal in that it has the power to drive people to change. However, there are broad disagreements on how to make life better for everyone (Ibid.: 1). The main reason is that various strategies exist which aim to achieve a better life for everyone (Sahleyesus 2005: 3). In the Ethiopian context in which this research was conducted, for instance, there have always been clear differences between governmental actors and NGOs on the one hand, and between different NGOs among themselves, on the other, with regard to their strategic preferences on how to realize the vision of making a better life for everyone. This is the case although NGO and state agreed on the purpose and end of development; many NGOs and governments in Ethiopia have aspired for the alleviation of poverty since the early 1960s.

Thus, it is clear that limiting scholarly debates to the end and purpose of development would ignore processes that may influence this end and purpose of development. A variety of actors may be involved in these processes. These actors are different not only in terms of strategies as shown earlier, but also in terms of interests that drive them, ideas, ideologies that they adhere to, values that they uphold etc. Hence, all these dynamics need to be considered to capture the fundamentals of development. This study uses development in the sense used by Kate Crehan and Achim von Oppen who define development as an arena where actors of differing strategies, interests, ideologies, ideas and values interface (Crehan / von Oppen 1994: 259-260). These actors may either cooperate or compete, dictated by these strategies, interests, ideologies, ideas and values (Ibid.: 47). Examining these set of dynamics challenges the literature that view development as a linear flow of ideas, programs and discourse. Viewing development as a linear flow of ideas, programs and discourse is proved to be flawed. Based on their research conducted in Zambia, Crehan and von Oppen correctly argue that we can come closer to the understanding of the vitality and political economy of development undertakings only when the complex web of meanings which various actors attach to programs and their competing strategies are brought into a coherent and holistic analysis (Ibid.: 259-260).

NGOs are actors in the arena. Objectives that justify operation of NGOs depend on their emergence in an area. Generally, NGOs that emerged prior to the Second World War, intended to relieve the suffering of victims of crisis namely wars, natural and manmade disasters etc. Since 1960s, NGOs have been drawn into discourses as to how to improve the lives of poor people in the Third World. These debates either generated new NGOs to improve the lives of the poor people or changed NGOs from mere humanitarian agencies to organizations with an objective to improve the lives of poor people (Teka 2000: 14). Considering this change, this paper also takes development to mean a conscious effort of organizations to ameliorate the plight of the poor and improve their living standards.

Although they assist the poor people to improve their living standards, the concept of NGOs has triggered debates among scholars. This is mainly due to the diversity that exists between NGOs in terms of purpose, interests and ideologies (Ibid.: 5). Scholars have defined NGOs in line with two major approaches. The first approach assumes that there exist two power groups in any society, namely governmental and non-governmental organizations. Thus, any organization that exists outside of the government could be referred to as a non-governmental organization. For instance, Mario Padron has defined NGOs as all organizations located outside the state's domain and the structure of government (Padron in Berhanu 2002: 120).

However, the above definition still failed to clarify what NGOs are. This is because the universe of non-governmental activities is wide, large and all-inclusive. In fact, any form of relationship that exists outside of the state could be called a non-governmental activity. The concept of the *third sector* makes it easier to understand NGOs. *Third sector* defines NGOs as distinct not only from the state, but also from businesses and corporations whose major orientations and activities are predicated on profit motives (Berhanu 2002: 120). However, NGOs as a *third sector* still does not tell us what NGOs are. The *third sector* includes a variety of organizations and it is vital to identify these organizations and pinpoint features that distinguish NGOs from these organizations. Dessalegn Rahmeto summarizes four broad groups of organizations that form civil society in Ethiopia. These are 1) NGOs 2) advocacy organizations (rights-based institutions, institutions committed to the protection of the environment, wildlife, etc., 3) interest group institutions (professional societies, trade unions, cooperatives, chambers of commerce, employers associations) and 4) cultural societies (including community organizations) (Rahmeto 2002: 106).

Some features make NGOs unique from organizations listed above. This uniqueness lies in the type of beneficiaries. Michaela Van Freyold says rightly that NGOs are "[...] those organizations whose goods and services are targeted at non-members". This makes NGOs different from a number of other civil society organizations namely the interest group institutions mentioned above, self-help organizations (Van Freyold in Sahleyesus 2005: 3).

As shown by Dessalegn, fields of action, such as that of human rights, can serve to distinguish NGOs from advocacy organizations. However, this is problematic for two reasons. To begin with, NGOs might also advocate non-organizational members' interests (Neubert 1997:3). Secondly,

over the last few decades, NGOs in Ethiopia, as in many African countries, have shifted from delivering goods and services to acting as advocates for the public interest. This research has thus used the term NGOs in a way understood by Sarah Michael. In her study of NGOs in Africa Sarah Michael states that NGOs are:

Development actors existing apart from government and corporations, operating on non-profit or not for profit basis with an emphasis on voluntarism, and pursuing a mandate of providing development services, undertaking communal development work or advocating on development issues (Michael 2004: 3).

Organizations that meet the above set of criteria are numerous. Scholars have attempted to facilitate the study of NGO by classifying them into groups. For instance, Bratton has classified NGOs according to size (big, medium, small); origin (national, international); behavior pattern (regime-conforming, regime-critical); central activity (relief/welfare, development); and orientation (secular, ecumenical). In this study, a distinction is made whenever necessary between NGOs of different origins, specifically between national and international NGOs and between religious and secular NGOs.

2 Theoretical Perspective

The past few decades have witnessed a dramatic growth in the number and scope of NGOs around the world (Lewis 2001: 1). The prominence accorded to NGOs has triggered debates about their efficiency and effectiveness with regard to tackling the challenges of development. Extensive research on the role of NGOs in development and emergency work in a variety of geographical context has emerged (Ibid.: 30; Lewis / Opoku-Mensah 2006: 669).

NGO research has, however, exhibited key limitations. Firstly, an over-emphasis was put on organizational case studies and some of these studies are rich in detail, but lack contextualization. Secondly, there has been a relatively weak theorization of the NGO phenomenon (Lewis / Opoku-Mensah 2006: 669). A closer look into these works shows an orientation towards implementation theory and some of the questions these works attempt to address include: what type of support, what type of project and what type of implementing agency would achieve a particular result (Neubert: 3). Neubert called this the "limitation of perspectives in development policy" (Ibid.: 53).

Decontextualization and weak theorization mentioned above undoubtedly originated from a conceptual problem that results from the perspectives of researchers. NGOs are considered as a "magic bullet" for poverty reduction in Third World countries (Lewis 2001: 1). This conception wrongly assumes that NGOs are not only separate from but also in opposition to the state. This is because what is inherent in NGOs and the state is considered to be different. While NGOs, it is believed, tend towards democracy, the state in Third World countries mainly in Africa is believed to be always prone to despotism (Rahmeto 2002: 103). The perspective that portrays NGOs as separate from the state is informed by liberal oppositional theoretical approach that takes NGO as "[...] a realm outside and in opposition to the state" (Ku 2002: 534). Assuming that the state is

inevitably coercive and oppressive, this theory favors a highly autonomous civil sphere outside the state. It advocates the self-management of the sphere, through self-help bodies, informal networks and social movements (Ibid.: 534).

One of the major limitations of the liberal oppositional theory is that it fails to consider the influences of the state. NGOs are not immune from the influences of state. In his useful insight about the influence of the state on NGOs, Jeffery Clark tells us that “NGOs can oppose, complement or reform the state but they can’t ignore it” (Clark in Lewis / Kanji 2009: 4). Other scholars like Alan Fowler support Clark’s assertion. Alan Fowler argues that NGOs are not “closed systems” with clear boundaries around them, but are part of “open systems”, which makes them highly dependent on events and resources in the environment and cannot be viewed in isolation from what goes on around them (Fowler in Lewis 2001: 140). Thus, the success of NGOs depends not just on their organizational qualities, but also on their “[...] ability to influence its environment and appreciate outside forces correctly” (Lewis 2001: 140). Scholars have since long called for a deeper analysis about NGOs’ attempts to deal with their environment including the state. David Lewis and Paul Opoku-Mensah argued emphatically that:

Rather than emphasizing only the “heroic” dimensions of NGO activities, in which they are seen only as principled moral and political actors opening up spaces for new voices and ideas, a more multidimensional analysis of relations of power and negotiation will [...] produce a far more convincing account of NGO relations with states and donors (Lewis / Opoku-Mensah 2006: 672).

All NGOs operate within a contextual matrix derived from specific locational and historical circumstances that change over time (Lewis 2001: 43). NGOs are often intimately connected with their home governments in relationships that are ambivalent and dynamic, sometimes cooperative, sometimes contentious, sometimes both simultaneously (Fisher 1997: 451). Under any of these circumstances, NGOs generally depend on the type of government that they deal with for room for maneuver to ensure their organizational survival and achieve the objectives for which they exist (Lewis 2001: 33).

Due to changes taking place within NGOs and as a result of the shifting character of NGO-state relation, it is quite helpful to subscribe to the analytical principles offered by a variety of social theories some of which are the liberal relational approach, theory of political opportunity structures and actor oriented theoretical perspective. The merit of the liberal relational approach is that it considers civil society as being necessarily engaged with the state. It also argues that civil society effectively defends itself against an encroaching government only through legal and political institutions (Ku 2002: 534). However, the last argument has a limitation as it assumes that state allows legal and political institutions to truly function. In many post-colonial African states, legal and political institutions operate as mechanisms to ensure the entrenchment of state interests (Hashmi 2006: 57).

However, the limitations of the liberal relational theory could be overcome by an actor-oriented theoretical perspective and political opportunity structures. Power is central in any form of relation between social actors. Thus, power relation between NGOs and the state is a central theme. States that were highly centralized in post-colonial Africa were not conducive to the operation of NGOs (Ibid.: 57). However, NGOs still depended on their skills for room for maneuver even in a difficult environment. The actor-oriented theory of Norman Long can explain the way social actors such as NGOs operate even in an oppressive context. Norman Long asserted that all forms of intervention are influenced by actors and their structures (Long 2001: 13). The theory he developed also delivered useful concepts to explain relationships between actors. One of these is *agency*. *Agency* attributes to each actor “knowledgeability” and “capability” to attempt to solve problems, learn how to intervene in the flow of social events around them, and, to a degree, monitor their own actions, observing how others react to their behaviors and taking note of the various contingent circumstances (Ibid.: 13).

NGO agency is a dynamic process in that it is created, transferred and lost depending on the contexts in which NGOs operate (Ibid.: 13). The theory of political opportunity structures complements the actor-oriented theory. Concepts of the former are part of the resource mobilization theories used to analyze certain movements. The theory of political opportunity puts its arguments on an assumption that aspects within a political milieu determine the rise of strategies exercised by civil societies in engaging the state as well as the outcomes of the engagement (Lopez / Tadem 2006: 38). Broader political systems that structure opportunities for collective action are the focus of this theory. While it does not ignore the dynamics within an organization, it rather points to the importance of movements to create and mobilize resources at their disposal to advance their agenda. The concept of political opportunity structures is, thus, deployed to explain how a specific political environment determines the outcome of the actions of civil society actors in each of respective sectors of the study and how these actors are also able to take advantage of opportunities that are external to them (Ibid.: 38).

3 Origins of NGOs in Ethiopia

Compared with the long history of the country, the emergence of NGOs in Ethiopia is a recent phenomenon, going back to the first quarter of the 20th century. However, humanitarian practice goes as far back as the introduction of Christianity. As is the case elsewhere, and especially in Africa, churches and missions pioneered humanitarian work. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been assisting poor people since its inception in the 4th century (Alvares 1961a: 541; 1961b: 224-226). The poor people who asked for the support of the national church and later from individuals and organizations were those who found it difficult to meet their basic necessities of life. Thus, “the poor” is used in this paper to mean people who lack their daily meal, clothing, shelter to protect them, and who seek some help and spiritual consolation to be self-reliant, those whose desire is not satisfied at all and see life as gloomy (Demessie 1967: 3).

As the number of people of the kind described above increased in the 1970s, the Church’s humanitarian activities took a more formal character. Concerned by the looming famine of the

1970s, the Church set up an NGO called Development and Interchurch Aid Commission (DIDAC) in 1972. As an NGO that secures funds from the church and foreign donors, DIDAC has focused on integrated rural development, food production, reforestation, water and health (Clark 2000: 9). Similarly, *Jesuits* took the credit in initiating the earliest Western education in the country in the 16th century (Sahleyesus 2005: 85). However, this effort was not sustained due to the rebellion against the conversion of the monarch, Susenyos (1607-1632) to Catholicism. As a result, the monarch resigned, transferring his power to his son, Fasiledes in 1632. The new monarch expelled foreigners from the country, marking the beginning of Ethiopia's "closed-door policy" (Abir 2006: 225). The country opened its door to foreign influences in the 19th century when both Catholic and Protestant missionaries, who went to the country in large numbers, started running welfare, education, health, community development along with their main agenda, evangelization (Berhanu 2002: 121).

A new generation of national NGOs emerged in the first quarter of the 20th century. Members of the ruling class who had exposure to the outside world set up NGOs. An important historical factor for this was the threat that Italy posed to the Ethiopian sovereignty. A group of political elites, worried by the Italian invasion, formed the Ethiopian Red Cross Society on 8 July 1935 to relieve victims of the anticipated war (The Ethiopian Red Cross Society: 14). In same way, women members of the royal family set up two more NGOs: the Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association (Pankhurst 1960: 45) and the Ethiopian Women's Association for Good Work Service (The Prime Minister's Office 2001: 131). Due to their close affiliation to the power center, the leadership of these organizations enjoyed the patronage of the imperial regime. However, the imperial government sometimes took measures that transgressed the autonomy of NGOs. This had to do with the competition for resources. A case in point is that the Ethiopian Women's Welfare Association initiated a lottery system which gave the Association a significant income, until the government decided to expropriate it. The Association protested, however, the government remained adamant. The government eventually decided that the Association would get only Eth \$ 50,000 every year from the Ministry of Finance (Ibid.: 12).

After 25 years, what could be described as development-oriented NGOs emerged. They are a group of organizations that intended not only to relieve victims of crisis but also to uplift the living standards of poor people. They believed that poverty was a complex phenomenon. However, they were of the opinion that poverty could be overcome by deploying material inputs and expertise. Development-oriented NGOs, thus, refers to a group of NGOs who believed that poverty in a specific locality could be conquered through mobilization of human and material resources. This idea emerged in Ethiopia with the rise of a professional middle class. The rise of a professional class itself had to do with education that expanded significantly in the mid twentieth century. Graduates of high school and university noted that neither the government nor self-help systems could address poverty in the country. Thus, national NGOs began to help fill the perceived void (Clark 2000: 4). These NGOs were of two types. The first were philanthropic NGOs. Philanthropic NGOs were driven by an ethical notion of charity intended to promote the welfare of poor people (Lewis / Kanji 2009: 30). With a view to promoting the welfare of poor people, philanthropic NGOs

usually ran a variety of programs including relief. The second type of NGOs could be called single issue development NGOs. Unlike philanthropic NGOs, single issue development NGOs run a selected program intended to address poverty in Ethiopia. The monarch himself pioneered the effort to set up philanthropic organization. In 1955, he set up the Haile Selassie I Foundation to set an example so that other well-to-do citizens would take it as a model (Jenbere 1959: 98). Emerging urban-based middle class, namely teachers, civil servants, military officers and their spouses, politicians and artists, modeled their organizations up on that of the Haile Selassie I Foundation (Sahleyesus 2005: 88-89). Single issue NGOs included the Family Guidance Association of Ethiopia (FGAE) and Agri-Service Ethiopia both of which were set up in 1969 (Ibid.: 89).

The two famines that occurred in 1973-74 and 1983-84 attracted international NGOs in large numbers. When famine broke out in 1973-74, eleven international NGOs based either on Protestant or Catholic faith was operative in Ethiopia. The Catholic Relief Service and Concern were among the most prominent organizations driven by the Catholic faith. Similarly, Lutheran World Federation, the American Presbyterian Mission, and World Vision were typical examples of protestant-based NGOs prominent during the 1973-74 famine (Rahmeto 2002: 106). During the 1983-84 famine, the number of international NGOs doubled. A new development during this time was that secular NGOs dominated the institutional landscape in Ethiopia over faith-based NGOs. Only a handful of secular NGOs had been involved to relieve victims of the 1970s famine. Due to the widespread publicity that the media carried out on behalf of famine victims, a number of secular NGOs opened field offices in Ethiopia (Ibid.: 106). Impressed by the number of NGOs that he saw, Kurt Janson, the United Nations Assistant Secretary General for Emergency Operations in Ethiopia, remarked that “[...] for a Marxist government to permit so many Western NGOs to function in all parts of the country was highly unusual” (Janson in Teka 2000: 232). The emergence of international NGOs influenced national NGOs in two ways. To begin with, international NGOs preferred funding national NGOs to running programs of their own. This was particularly true during the 1970s. Thus, Oxfam used to fund the Christian Relief Fund (CRF). Similarly, the Catholic Relief Service from the United States and Concern from Ireland were funding the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat. Another example was that the Lutheran World Federation and World Vision used to fund the Ethiopian Evangelical Church MekanuYesus. The trend to fund national NGOs undoubtedly increased their profile and visibility. International NGOs also influenced Ethiopians to take the initiative to set up NGOs to deal with famines. Ethiopians who were shocked by the two famines modeled their NGOs on international NGOs. The earliest of these was the Haile Selassie I University Famine Relief Committee that was set up in 1973 by faculty members of Haile Selassie I University (Beyene 1988: 4). Other Ethiopians in private business and civil service also set up NGOs of one kind or another to deal with the recurrence of disasters throughout 1980s (Sahleyesus 2005: 123).

The relative liberalism that followed the collapse of the military government in May 1991 and the rise of donors’ support contributed to the fact that citizens again took the initiative to set up various forms of NGOs in the country (Ibid.: 123). While those NGOs set up earlier were still

operational, dealing with emergency situations that followed the fall of the military government, two new types of NGOs showed up in the 1990s. The first group was those that defend human and democratic rights. The earliest of these were inspired by vocal critique of the government and lawyers (Ibid.: 110). This group of NGOs was much more visible from the late 1990s due to donor mediation that came about as part of the liberalization process (Rahmeto 2008a: 97). The second group came into existence out of the concerns of the government. Concerned about the rise of human rights NGOs especially, the government set up pro-government NGOs. Firstly, ex-relief organizations of rebel movements were promoted into NGOs (Vaux 1991: 2). Secondly, the government created ethnic-based development associations in different parts of the country (Ibid.: 97).

To sum up, NGOs evolved in response to diverse influences within Ethiopia and outside of it. Groups of people with diverse backgrounds and motives played a key role in these evolutions. Religious groups with the motive to evangelize Ethiopians took the initiative to set up the earliest NGOs. Humanitarianism has also been the second most important factor for the formation of NGOs. This group of NGOs includes those NGOs set up by Ethiopians to deal with the anticipated disaster of the Italian invasion and the famines that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. The motive of a few individuals to democratize state institutions in the 1990s and state responses to this motivation resulted in two different types of NGOs. Firstly, citizens set up NGOs to lobby the government to respect human and democratic rights. The second type of NGOs were those NGOs which the government set up to counter the influence of the first group of NGOs. Seen from historical perspective, the various motives outlined above combined to shape NGOs that operated across the three forms of government in Ethiopia.

The number of NGOs has been increasing rapidly in Ethiopia. Throughout the 1970s, about twenty five NGOs were operative, mostly in relief and rehabilitation (Ibid.: 106). The number doubled in response to the outbreak of the Ethiopian famine of the 1980s (Agri-Service Ethiopia 2000a: 8). By the middle of the 1990s, the number of registered NGOs reached 350 (Rahmeto 2002: 106). Recent statistics produced by the Ethiopian Charity and Society Agency, an official body that oversees NGOs, shows that there are 2776 registered civil society organizations most of which are NGOs (Ethiopian Charity and Society Agency 2014: 1-14). This exponential growth of NGOs was part of what is known in the literature as NGOization. NGOization refers to professionalization and institutionalization of social action (Choudry/Kapoor 2011: 3). This process has to do with the global neo-liberalism that gained an impetus following the end of the Cold War. Major western powers have since then argued that the road to democracy in developing countries especially in Africa lies in the active involvement of civil society (of which NGOs are part) in the political process (Rahmeto 2002: 106). Certainly, this process played an important role in increasing the number of NGOs as well as their influence in Africa, including in Ethiopia. However, it is wrong to associate NGO visibility with only global influence. The local context encouraged the rise of NGOs as well. In the Ethiopian context, the 1980s and 1990s is characterized by profound chaos. The ongoing war in the north not only weakened the national economy but also displaced people in large number who needed support. The end of the war with the defeat of the Ethiopian

government did not end this chaos. A number of Ethiopians who had depended on the military government - namely civil servants, members of the army and government officials - now demanded support for their survival. In order to deal with this demand, individuals or a group of individuals set up NGOs of various kinds (Personal interview with Mr. Mitiku: 2012, September 10).

The number of NGOs as well as the diversity that exists between them poses a major methodological challenge to their study. Therefore, it appears imperative to take a case study methodological perspective to deal with this challenge. To that end, Agri-Service Ethiopia (ASE), Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Association (CCRDA) and Oxfam GB (Oxfam) are selected. The selection is made on the basis of their development orientation in their operation across the three political regimes in Ethiopia namely the imperial, the military and the current ethnic-based regimes. Yet, it is difficult to say that the selected NGOs are all the same in origin and orientation. Oxfam GB, for instance, is foreign and ASE and CCRDA are national in origin. Likewise, Oxfam GB and ASE are secular and CCRDA combined both secular and religious dynamics in terms of orientation. It is, thus, vital to take note of the diverse attributes and their influences on the operation of the selected NGOs. To that purpose, a historical approach is preferred. A historical approach recognizes diverse attributes and draws attention to the influences of these diverse attributes on decisions that NGO leaders passed in response to changing contexts. There are two strategic issues to treat the diverse attributes as well as their influences. The first one has to do with a set of development ideals driving NGOs in a geographical context such as Ethiopia. The second issue that logically follows the first one is related to translations of these ideals into action. This paper, thus, aims to trace the origins of ideals of the selected NGOs as well as the way they translated these ideals into actions. In doing the last task, the paper gives due attention to contexts in which NGOs operated. Before doing this, we trace the origins of the selected NGOs.

The origins of the NGOs studied in this project are traced both inside and outside Ethiopia due to diverse contexts in which they were formed. Two groups of actors played an active part in the formation of ASE. The first group was composed of expatriate teachers with Catholic backgrounds. Despite the fact that they were inspired by Christian values to help the poor, this group of individuals did not plan to put their initiative under the influence of the Catholic Church. The first project agreement signed on 1 June 1969 stipulated that the project would function autonomously, detached from the Catholic Church (Agri-Service Ethiopia 2000a: 13). There were two reasons for this. Firstly, the protagonists planned to serve all poor people regardless of their religious backgrounds (Akpak Studio 2000). Secondly, the actors had the desire to pursue their own development approach that emphasized utilization of the potential of project participants as a strategic direction. However, the founders of ASE saw that social evils such as superstition remained a major obstacle to tap into the potential of project participants (Ibid.). The founders of ASE were deeply concerned also by the overall perception of the rural people about their potential. The seriousness of the problem is well captured in one of the earliest sources that stated that “[...] experience shows us every day to what extent peasants underestimate themselves and easily take refuge in fatalism” (Agri-Service Ethiopia 1975: 2).

The second group of persons who shared the observations of the founders of ASE about impediments to rural residents was politicians. They were part of a group of officials within the government that aspired for reform. Two officials played an active part in the process of the formation of ASE. The first one was *Dejjazmach*¹ Girmachew Tekle Hawariat who was Minister of Agriculture. He was considered to be one of the most progressive officials of the imperial government. As a minister who was managing rural development effort in the country, *Dejjazmach* Girmachew invited development organizations from abroad to complement the efforts of the government. As part of this, he invited the Institut Africain pour le Développement Economique et Social - Centre Africain de Formation (hereafter INADES-Formation), a Catholic NGO to implement the educational program it had been running in Francophone Africa, in 1965. This had two major effects. Firstly, it facilitated the relation that the founders of ASE had launched with INADES-Formation. INADES-Formation influenced the founders of ASE on a number of issues. For instance, INADES-Formation increased the conviction of ASE's founders that educating the rural residents about their potential was the only way to true development (Akpak Studio 2000). Secondly, it eased the bureaucratic hurdle for ASE to get legal recognition. The reason for this was that the objective for which ASE stood was discussed and approved not only by officials of the Ministry of Agriculture but also by the monarch himself. In fact, the approval of the monarch could be considered as a seal that assured the organization the legal status. Concerning this, one of the founders of ASE himself said that ASE was established on "June 6, 1969 at the feet of H.M. Haile Selassie I" (Agri-Service Ethiopia 2000a: 33). The approval of the monarch was formalized by the Ministry of Interior on 24 December 1969 when ASE was given a legal certificate (Agri-Service Ethiopia n.d.-a: 1). The second official who played an active part in the establishment of ASE was *Dejjazmach* Wolde Semait, who was the governor of Wollaita province. *Dejjazmach* Wolde Semait was considered to be one of the progressive officials of the imperial government. Due to a variety of activities that he carried out, *Dejjazmach* Wolde Semait was called "The father of Wollaita development" (Agri-Service Ethiopia 2000a: 33). Expansion of education was one of these activities. *Dejjazmach* Wolde Semait once built a school close to the Catholic school where Father Henry, one of the founders of ASE, was teaching. Father Henry felt that it was not fair to run two schools closely and he complained to *Dejjazmach* Wolde Semait. *Dejjazmach* Wolde Semait advised Father Henry to incorporate agricultural course to teach not only the youths but also the peasants. This shifted the career of Father Henry from a teacher at the school to a founder of ASE that came to stand for "the social and economic advancement of the rural poor" (Agri-Service Ethiopia 1989: 24).

The cooperation government officials showed to the founders of ASE had broader explanation that can be traced back to the Italian occupation period i.e. 1935-1941. Following an attempt to assassinate Rodolfo Graziani in Ethiopia in 1937, the Italians decimated the educated class of Ethiopians. This was because colonial officials believed that educated Ethiopians conspired against Italian interests in the region. Also, the Italians coerced faith-based NGOs that had helped

¹ A politico-military title of Ethiopia during the imperial regime that came to an end in 1974; its literal meaning is commander of the gate

educate those Ethiopians to leave the country on the ground that they had intervened in the political affairs of the country. The restored monarchy started, thus, pursuing a policy that encouraged NGOs of various origins to come and launch especially educational programs to satisfy the new demand (Alemneh 1970: 6). The encouragement gained momentum in the 1960s when the government that started the first planned development activities sought the assistance of NGOs. The policy the government followed resulted in the visibility of NGOs in Ethiopia, many of which had religious roots (Rahmeto 2009: 50-66). The famine that broke out in 1973-74 in Ethiopia brought those NGOs under the umbrella of the Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Association (CCRDA). The idea to create CCRDA can be traced to the civil war in Nigeria (1967-1970). When the Ethiopian famine broke out, one of the Catholic priests who had participated in a joint relief operation during the Nigerian civil war proposed that collective action of NGOs is to be put in place to effectively deal with the famine in Ethiopia. Father Kevin Doheny who proposed the idea to set up CCRDA described in his memoir that “for me, it [Christian Relief Fund, the precursor of CCRDA] was an outgrowth of the Biafran war. I would not have got the idea were it not for Biafra” (Doheny 1997: 100).

The founders of CCRDA had come to Ethiopia basically to preach the Gospel of God. To that end, they used to offer limited social services such as education, health and some community development activities. Thus, like that of ASE, the founders of CCRDA were driven by Christian value. Describing the role of Christianity, one of the earliest publications of the Association tells us that “[CCRDA] is solidified by the basic Christian commitment to serve [the poor people]” (CRDA 1977: 1). However, the leadership of CCRDA intentionally kept at minimal the influence of religion. This was because the founders were divided over the interpretation of Christianity. This division among various denominations eclipsed all discussions held to establish CCRDA. Even after a consensus was reached to set up an association to coordinate the relief operation, a representative of the American Lutheran Mission rejected the idea. His justification was that the proposed CCRDA would be dominated by the Catholics and that it would undermine religious freedom of members (Beyene 1988: 4). The Ethiopian Orthodox Church had from the start rejected the idea of creating an all-inclusive consortium (Ibid.: 4). However, the leadership of CCRDA used Christianity to mobilize resources. In a memo he circulated on 9 October 1985, the chairman of the Association told members that “if we look at the roster of donors, they are church related organizations who see in CRDA [CCRDA] an ecumenical experiment that is working” (Gebre 1985: 3). It could, thus, be argued that though they were inspired by Christian value, representatives of 13 faith-based NGOs set up and sustained CCRDA to “relieve human suffering and improve the standard of living for the underprivileged people in Ethiopia” (CRDA 1977: 1).

The food crisis that brought 13 faith-based NGOs under the umbrella of CCRDA appealed also to international NGOs to rush into Ethiopia and rescue famine victims. One of these was Oxfam GB. The origins of Oxfam GB go back to the Second World War. The Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (OCFR), the precursor of Oxfam GB, was set up by a handful of individuals including the Mayor of Oxford in October 1942 to rescue victims of the war in Greece (Black in Teka 2000: 10). From the early part of 1960s, Oxfam expanded the scope of its operation and took global mandate

(Ibid.: 24). Oxfam's presence in Ethiopia goes back to the early 1960s and when the Ethiopian famine of 1973-74 reached its critical stage, the organization sent Toby Gooch to open an office in Ethiopia (Ibid.: 24).

To sum up, NGOs studied in this project were set up by a relatively well-to-do class who were driven both by social and religious motives. In laying down the structures of NGOs, these protagonists did not fail to secure the cooperation of government officials. The cooperation that the founders of NGOs secured was due to post-Italian period policy of the imperial government.

4 NGO Development Visions and State in Ethiopia

NGOs might be able to formulate development visions. However, the translation of these visions into action has been negotiated by powerful actors. This is shown by drawing attention to three NGOs in Ethiopia. In the 20th century, Ethiopia has witnessed three types of political regimes with different ideals with which they acted to shape the society. NGOs themselves construed major events in the country and based on their interpretations, they either complemented the government or acted against it. These actions of the government and NGOs had its own influences on NGO visions. Donors also influenced the interactions between NGOs and governments. A study of a multi-level interactions between NGOs, governments and donors attests to the fact that NGO vision enjoyed opportune moment during the imperial time, were instrumentalized by the military government and revitalized during the relative liberalism from 1991 onwards.

4.1 The Roots of NGO Visions and their Interplay with the Imperial Government

NGOs in Ethiopia have articulated their visions since the 1960s. These visions focused on poverty alleviation until May 1991 when the military government came to an end. Following the end of the military dictatorship, NGOs have envisaged a situation where communities enjoy the full spectrum of human and democratic rights. Neither poverty alleviation nor the quest for human and democratic rights are too distant from those of governments in Ethiopia during this period, although official discourses on human rights are only a recent phenomenon.

However, there have always been marked differences between governmental actors and NGOs on the one hand, and between different NGOs among themselves, on the other, with regard to their strategic preferences on how to achieve development. During the imperial period, NGOs acted autonomously² in pursuing their visions. This, I argue, had a lot to do with the understanding that both NGOs and the government shared the 'same' vision.

In a sharp contrast with dominant development model of the 1950s proposed by major donor organizations such as the World Bank, Swedish International Development Agency etc. that

² During the imperial period, NGOs depended on their own effort to generate income and the influence of donors on NGOs' autonomy was minimal

emphasized macro-economic growth, NGOs put the poor people to be their focus of development. The founders of ASE, for instance, identified constraints that, they believed, underdeveloped the rural residents. Although these constraints were diverse in type, superstition and ignorance remained the preoccupation of the founders of ASE. The founders of ASE were not only preoccupied by the nature of these constraints but also appalled by the fact that rural residents failed to take initiatives to improve their status. The last problem originated from the fact that rural residents underestimated their potential to change their socio-economic status (Agri-Service Ethiopia 1975: 2). The founders of ASE, thus, concluded that rural residents would remain poor as long as they maintain the way they assess their potential (Ibid.: 2).

Though they saw that the rural people were hit by poverty, the founders of ASE believed that rural residents have the potential to develop themselves. A text produced in 1975 attests to this. It states that “[...] no one can develop small farmers. It is up to the farmers to develop themselves. Other people and development organization can help them but in the final analysis it is the farmers themselves who are the agents of their own development” (Ibid.: 2). Premised on this, the founders of ASE envisioned an Ethiopia where rural peasants reached the stage of adulthood, capable of negotiating with dominant actors (Personal interview with Mr. Assefa: 2012, October 12). They believed that a human being reached adulthood when he/she becomes fully conscious about himself/herself as well as the social, economic and political environment in which he/she lives. As a result, the organization put in place resources “[...] to help arouse in them a greater awareness of their dignity as human being” (Agri-Service Ethiopia 1975: 2-3). To that end, ASE adopted correspondence education as a strategy (Personal interview with Mr. Worku: 2013, September 3; Personal interview with Mr. Assefa: 2012, October 12).

ASE’s vision and its strategic preference can be traced to INADES-Formation. INADES-Formation believed that the rural people in the Third World have the potential to develop themselves and that rural education is the only way to true development (Personal interview with Mr. Worku: 2013, September 3; Personal interview with Mr. Assefa: 2012, October 12). This again was originated from the global self-help development discourse that argued that people have the potential to develop themselves (Personal interview with Mr. Worku: 2013, September 3). There was, in fact, one major difference between ASE and INADES-Formation with regard to the role an organization would play in the process. While INADES-Formation tended to argue for the provision of technical information to project participants, ASE opted for an inclusive approach to assist the poor people. With regard to the differences, one of the sources states that “because we are not only concerned with do’s and don’ts [INADES-Formation] but also to achieve his [a peasant] fulfillment as a human being. Our is an integrated approach to life in all its complexity” (Agri-Service Ethiopia n.d.b: 1).

Like that of ASE, Oxfam’s vision is traced to the global development discourse. It was, in fact, this discourse that transformed Oxfam from a mere humanitarian organization to an organization with a defined development vision. This shift took place in the early 1960s in response to the new debate that followed the “Decade of Development”. The debate resulted in a shift from elimination of economic bottlenecks to rapid industrialization to eradication of poverty through sustainable

livelihood, increased production and improving the standard of living in the Third World (Ibid.: 116). Oxfam welcomed the shift of emphasis that now put poor people in developing countries center stage. Aware of this, Oxfam articulated its vision and included it in the new Memorandum of Association approved in 1965. According to the Memorandum, Oxfam stands:

To relieve poverty, distress and suffering in any part of the world (including starvation, sickness or any physical disability or affliction) and primarily when arising from any public calamity (including famine, earthquake, pestilence, war or civil disturbance) or the immediate or continuing result of want natural or artificial resources, or the means to develop them, and whether acting alone or in association with others (Oxfam 1965: 15)

Unlike ASE and Oxfam whose visions are traced to discourses that involved self-help development and poverty alleviation respectively, the founders of CCRDA articulated their vision in the midst of the food crisis that threatened the whole nation. The founders of CCRDA observed the famine situation in Wollo and Tigray. As described earlier, theological differences undermined initially the discussion to set up CCRDA (Doheny 1997: 99). Some representatives of NGOs even said that they came to Ethiopia to preach the Gospel of God, not to feed the hungry (Beyene 1991: 97-100). Those who showed the willingness came together not only to relieve victims of the 1970s famine but to work together towards the alleviation of suffering. Thus, the founders embraced a “[...] collective vision of improving the plight of the poor in Ethiopia through the willingness of working together” (CRDA 1997: 1).

The NGO visions I have been examining contained a potential conflict with the government. ASE’s aspiration for an empowered rural people having the agency at their disposal to negotiate with the government assumed the existence of a power imbalance between the rulers and the ruled. The vision called to redressing this. Similarly, Oxfam believed that, manipulated by power holders, structures of any sorts underdeveloped the peasantry. Because of this, the structures were either to be bypassed or reformed and new structures were to be created or adapted (Ibid.: 208). One of the authors, Maggie Black called it Oxfam’s “anti-institutionalism” (Black 1992: 208).

Despite their views at this level of analysis, NGOs in Ethiopia believed that the imperial government was the main development agent to work alongside. This could be seen from the perspective of NGOs and the government’s attitude towards the role of NGOs. NGOs appreciated the efforts of the government to uplift the lives of the people. Agriculture, which was the chief sector of NGO engagement, received a fair share of the government’s funding particularly from the late 1960s when, as elsewhere in the world, there was rapid shift towards improving the lives of small holder agriculture (Rahmeto 2009: 50). Earlier, the government had focused on commercial farming as a means to boost production and increase foreign exports (Ibid.: 50).

The government, for its part, welcomed initiatives that would add more dimensions to its efforts. A typical example of this was that the government recognized urban residents’ initiatives to set up NGOs to carry out development activities in their home areas (Rahmeto 2008b: 104). This

gained constitutional status. The revised constitution of 1955 recognized the right to form economic associations (Clapham 1969: 177). This right to associations was further elaborated five years later in the Civil Code of Ethiopia (The Imperial Government of Ethiopia 1960).

Like any NGO in the country, NGOs selected for this project appreciated the effort already underway by the government and considered their own initiatives as complementary to it. For instance, a text produced by ASE that assessed the effort of the government describes that efforts underway in the country “[...] are necessary, especially for a quick economic take-off” (Agri-Service Ethiopia 1975: 4). ASE was also motivated and assisted by government officials who initiated development efforts at the grassroots in the same area where ASE was operational. One of these was the extraordinary initiative which the provincial administration led by *Dejjazmatch* Wolde Semait took to improve the lives of the people. In his memoir, *Dejjazmatch* Wolde Semait states that prior to his arrival in Wollaita in 1963, there had never been any sign of development (Agri-Service Ethiopia 2000a: 27). The second initiative was the Wollaita Agricultural Development Unit (WADU) in Wollaita province set up in 1968 by the Ministry of Agriculture. The Unit stood to provide peasants with easy access to modern inputs such as fertilizers, selected seeds etc., to promote better farming techniques and farm implements, to organize peasants into cooperatives enabling them to have better access to credit, to expand extension services, to improve marketing facilities and prices for peasant produce, and to build rural public works such as feeder roads, water projects and environmental protection schemes (Agri-Service Ethiopia 1975: 27-28). ASE secured a wide range of supports from officials of the two initiatives at the grassroots level. Concerning this, one of the protagonists of ASE, Father Henry, remembers that the earliest employees of ASE were “[...] backed as we were by local authorities of the government” (Agri-Service Ethiopia 2000a: 24).

Government officials offered their assistance to ASE because they believed that the educational program of ASE was the same as the agricultural extension service of the government. In fact, they were quite different. While the agricultural extension program focused more on technical application of improved agricultural activities, the education program of ASE was all about the creation of well-informed peasant class. ASE itself recognized the difference that existed between the two programs. In one of its texts, ASE described of its own position that “the final aim of development is not man’s material well-being but man himself. Man must not only have more, he must be more” (Agri-Service Ethiopia 1975: 2). Assisted by government officials, ASE saw the earliest sign of success in its endeavor. This could be explained in terms of the impact it created. Concerning the earliest success of the organization, one of the founders of ASE remembers that “[...] we could see, as soon as ASE began to walk, that farmers’ steps were backed and their ambition enlightened through their becoming more conscious of their own value [...] of the real value of their own growth and wisdom” (Agri-Service Ethiopia 2000a: 24). This success of ASE was publicized to a larger extent. Firstly, other missionaries emulated its initiative. The case in point was that a Catholic priest, Reverend Marcel Cannault initiated a similar project in Ashira which was located 30 kilometers away from Dobbo where ASE had opened an office in 1967 (Ibid.: 12). Secondly, even before the official establishment of ASE, the monarch who had heard much

about the project visited the project in 1968 and gave moral support to the founders of ASE (Agri-Service Ethiopia: 2009: 1).

Like ASE, Oxfam extended its appreciation to the effort underway in the country and assisted the initiatives. Oxfam extended its earliest assistance to the government by rescuing victims of famine in Gojjam province in 1964 (Personal interview with Mr. Mesfin: 2012, October 10; Teka 2000:141). Moreover, it financed a resettlement scheme called Angar Gutin Development Project in Wollega province in the early 1972 (Solidarité et Développement 1973: 4). Initiated jointly by the government and Solidarité et Développement, an NGO from France, this project aimed to resettle and improve smallholder farmers through an integrated approach. The government left the project to operate with its own autonomy. The project started by distributing land and agricultural inputs (Oxen, fertilizers, pesticides, seeds etc.) to 300 tenants and landless peasants who immediately brought 160 hectares of land under cultivation (Ibid.: 1). The enthusiasm of project participants to improve their status was impressive. In fact, the interest was so high that the project had to reject the applications submitted by project participants who came from distant places. Commenting on the number of applications submitted on 8 October 1973 alone, the organization stated that “[...] this morning, around 60 people applied for a place at the center; they came from Wollega, Shoa, and Gojjam provinces. During the past months, applications to join the project have risen sharply. Yet there was no announcement that there would be place for new candidates” (Ibid.: 1).

However, farmers who became project participants were able to improve their living conditions. An eyewitness who was aware of the living conditions of project participants prior to the beginning of the project reported that “compared with their previous situation settlers found their income and prospects improved” (van Santen 2010: 23). Moreover, the project strengthened the relationship between Oxfam and the Ethiopian government. The government used this cordial relationship to appeal to Oxfam to open an office when famine occurred in the country in 1973-74. The invitation was accepted. In his letter to the Minister of Justice, Brendan Gormley, the Africa Director of Oxfam describes that Oxfam opened the first office in Addis “primarily in response to a request by the then Government [the imperial government] of Ethiopia for support in responding to a severe drought situation and also to assist in addressing the conditions of extreme poverty persisting in some parts of the country” (Gormley 1998).

NGOs not only acted autonomously but also influenced officials of the government. Even before they set up their organization, the founders of CCRDA continuously argued with government officials for a concerted action to be taken to deal with the famine including making it public. Influenced by their pressure, the Minister of Community Development and Social Affairs organized a meeting in which the minister for the first time used famine to describe the food crisis in the country. Describing the objective of the meeting, one of the founders remembers that it was “to press the Ethiopian imperial government to make the famine that claimed many lives public” (Beyene 1988: 3). The government consistently supported CCRDA after its establishment. This was because CCRDA remained the only broad-based organization to coordinate relief operation until later when the military government [1974-1991] strengthened the Relief and Rehabilitation

Commission (RRC) which the imperial government had set up in April 1974 (CRDA 1977: 11). One of the earliest steps that carried CCRDA forward was that government officials allowed the organization to open bank accounts even before it was legally registered (Doheny 1997: 98). Moreover, largely due to the continued support of the government, CCRDA together with its members was able to control the famine situation a year after its establishment (Christian Relief Fund 1974: 5).

To summarize, NGOs articulated development visions that ultimately originated from the global discourses as well as from the food crisis that occurred in Ethiopia in the 1970s. These visions (of Oxfam and ASE) or the context in which these visions (of CCRDA) were formulated contained potential conflict with the government. Despite their potential conflict, these NGOs pursued their visions in a way that appreciated at least the government's effort to uplift the lives of the poor people. The government itself remained benevolent to NGOs, respecting their autonomy. This was because the government believed that they would complement its own effort. This cordial relation contributed to the earliest success of NGOs in Ethiopia.

4.2 Instrumentalization of NGOs

The relative autonomy with which NGOs acted in their visions was seriously questioned during the revolution that occurred in 1974. *Dergue*³ came to power in the midst of the revolution and undermined the autonomy that NGOs had enjoyed during the imperial period. This was part of the process that narrowed public space. Soon after it took power, *Dergue* declared Socialism to be the only ideology of the state and it started to restructure the economy and society in line with socialist principles. It nationalized private property through the Ownership and Control of the Means of Production Proclamation put in place in March 1975. The government introduced the Rural Land Proclamation that abolished the land tenure system of the imperial regime in April 1975. In July 1975, the government announced nationalization of urban land including excess houses owned by individuals (Clapham 1987: 152). In early 1975, the government deployed high school and university students to rural areas to organize society and teach them about the ideals of socialism and distribute land to each household (Rahmeto 2009: 140). Though the government stated officially that they would have their own autonomy in serving the public, a dense network of organizations set up throughout the country remained an implementation arm of the military government. When this became clear, the government itself confessed that “[...] those organizations set up so far and to be set up in the future would never be politically neutral” (Ministry of Agriculture 1980: 32). To make things worse, alternative forms of organizations were banned. Any form of organization that the government could not control directly was considered as reactionary and they were decimated (Ibid.: 32). Even self-help associations that had a functional value to urban residents were considered by the government to be a remnant of the *old regime*. Thus, they were closed down (Rahmeto 2002: 104).

³ A Ge'ez word for council

Restructuring the economy and society was carried out with a view to defining the future Ethiopia. Politicians in the 1960s and 1970s were driven by the ideals of socialist Ethiopia where there was no exploitation of man by man and where the society is self-sufficient in order to withstand imperialism. In doing so, this generation of Ethiopian politicians did not intend to negotiate with the context in which they were born and grew up. Part of the reason for this was that prominent supporters of the imperial regime were still operating against the revolution through an armed force called the Ethiopian Democratic Union. As a result, revolutionaries in the government and in the opposition not only condemned the imperial regime, but also called for a complete divorce from it. Concerning this, the chairman of the military government who addressed an audience vowed that “we will liquidate the evil legacies of the past” (Clapham 1987: 155).

The government did not spare the NGO sector. In fact, the NGO sector was the first victim of the revolution. As soon as it came to power, the government decimated NGOs that members of the ruling class had set up. These included the Haile Selassie I Foundation. In their reference to the issue, scholarly works done so far describe that the military government crippled the NGOs sector in the country. This, however, holds partial truth. Many of the NGOs themselves willingly submitted to the government. This calls for examining the issue from the perspective of the government and NGOs. Prior to that, it is vital to summarize the reactions of NGOs to the new government. Four forms of NGOs reaction were evident. The first group of NGOs withdrew from the country in the earliest time. These were faith-based NGOs that had operated during the imperial period. They found out that it is difficult to operate in the country where freedom of religion is suppressed by the government (Rahmeto et al 1990: 15). The second group of NGOs included a few international NGOs namely Médecins Sans Frontières from France that openly condemned the government’s abuse of power (Dodd 1985: 130). The third group of NGOs included national NGOs who became surrogates of the government. The last group of NGOs was those that represented the majority of international NGOs that acted covertly against the attempt of the government to build a strong socialist state. Despite their covert resistance that in no way had any effect, they openly lend themselves to be instrumentalized by the regime (Campbell 1996: 13). The first two groups of NGOs left the country due to their own positions and our discussion now focuses on the interactions between the last two groups of NGOs and the military government.

The ideological foundation of the military government did not allow the existence of organizations that could articulate alternative development models. However, the military government tolerated NGOs out of necessity. The government fought bloody wars against various armed groups in the North and the Somali invading forces. All these drained the state treasury (Ibid.: 13). Moreover, due to its poor human rights records and ideological differences, the government was unable to secure aid from Western governments. Government officials associated every problem the country faced with major Western powers’ refusal to support Ethiopia. For instance, in the context of the famine of 1983–1984, a politburo of the government made a conference speech in which he blamed Western donors for having failed to provide Ethiopia with the financial support to pre-empt the famine. He said that:

It is because the necessary funds have not been available for development efforts and for an increase in food production in the traditional drought-prone areas of the country that we are now witnessing the current tragedy of death and starvation and are unable, from own resources, either to prevent famine or to mitigate its effect (Kolemen 1985: 9).

As a result, NGOs were considered to attract the foreign currency the country needed (Campbell 1996: 13).

Although it tolerated NGOs, the government did not have the intention to allow them autonomy in their visions of development. Two major factors explain this. The first one was ideological. The government believed that NGOs were purveyors of western values which, it believed, had to be curtailed (Wolde Giorgis 1988: 155). Secondly, the government did not have the resources to deliver services to the people. As a result, the government was forced to allow NGOs to bring in foreign currency. On the other hand, the government did not want the people to know that the government failed to deliver services. The result of this was that the government put NGOs under strict supervision of governmental organizations. An evaluation done in 1990 showed that the “[...] working environment in Ethiopia has enforced NGOs into close relationship with government organizations with the result that donors [NGOs] are viewed by peasants as part of the implementation arms of the government” (Rahmeto et al 1990: 15). Thus, the government went to great lengths to drive NGOs according to its own policies. However, I argue that many of the NGOs in Ethiopia lent themselves to be instruments of the military government much more than the government’s influences.

Like many ordinary citizens, the leaders of ASE, influenced by INADES-Formation that was one of its donors, welcomed a set of measures that the military government introduced especially rural land redistribution. They appreciated also the intention of the government to make education for all including the peasants. In that context, ASE did not intend to take seriously any difference between its own rural education program and that of the government. A note circulated by the middle of 1970s when ASE sought to work alongside the Ministry of Agriculture clearly shows that ASE did not intend to take seriously the difference between its program and that of the government. Part of the note written in Amharic reads:

“ድርጅቱ ለገጠሩ የሚሰጠው ትምህርት እርሻ ሚኒስቴር ከሚሰጠው አገልግሎት የአሰራሩ ዘዴ የተለየ ቢሆንም አላማው ተመሳሳይ ስለሆነ የበለጠ ሊያበረክት የሚችለው ከግብርና ሚኒስቴር ጎንጎል ጎን ለመስራት ሲቺል ነው ብሎ INADES-Formation ስላመነበት ድርጅቱ ለጊዜው በእርሻ ሚኒስቴር ሆኖ የሚሰራበት ስምምነት እንዲደረግ እ.ኤ.አ. በሃምሌ ወር 1975 አ.ም ጥያቄ በደብዳቤ አቀረበ”

This roughly means that “[...] though there is a difference on the method, INADES-Formation submitted a draft agreement in July 1975 based on which ASE would operate alongside the Ministry of Agriculture for their aim is the same” (Agri-Service Ethiopia 1980: 1).

ASE developed pro-government attitude partly due to its own internal weakness to cope with the rapidly changing rural context. The organization, that had operated in a relatively stable rural setting, was overwhelmed by the profound changes. As a result, it lacked the authority to mobilize the populace and it felt that it had lost its organizational relevance. In order to have the authority, ASE argued for an integration of its educational program into that of the Ministry of Agriculture that was a leading actor for mass mobilization (Ibid.: 7). The organization argued that the decision to operate along official lines is justified. In one of its texts, ASE stressed that “[...] any organization with an essentially educative nature such as ASE is necessarily concerned by the major socio-political events which are in the process of transforming” (Agri-Service Ethiopia 1989: 9). In fact, it was not reformulating the visions which ASE had embraced by considering changes taking place in the country. It was rather a deliberate attempt by the organization to win official support. A text printed in the midst of the revolution is indicative of this. It says that “[...] legally, it [ASE] has so far been a private organization; in practice it has been semi-governmental” (Agri-Service Ethiopia 1975: 6).

The Ministry of Agriculture, whose resources had been depleted because of the profound rural reorganization, welcomed ASE’s plan for integration. This was because the Ministry saw huge resources under the command of ASE. A memo circulated by the Ministry attests to this. Part of it reads:

Its [ASE’s] programmes, the production of teaching materials and aids, its rural radio forums and farmers’ newsletters are invaluable for the dissemination of ideals and methods. Even its programme of training farmers though on a limited scale has provided an opportunity for ASE to gain practical experience with the needs and conditions of farmers in rural Ethiopia. The facilities and experience that ASE has created over many years in Ethiopia could complement the efforts of the Ministry of Agriculture that has already created an extension network covering most parts of the country (Agri-Service Ethiopia 1982: 6).

The pro-government attitude of ASE was not an exception. It was rather the rule that national NGOs pursued. National NGOs not only appreciated sets of measures that they considered to be progressive and pro-poor, but also financed even the most controversial projects of the government. The financial structures were in favor of NGOs. Major donors withdrew from Ethiopia due to human right violations and ideological differences. These donors who were now far away from Ethiopia sought to reach out to the poor through NGOs; they sent money to NGOs who used it without any significant follow up from donors. Moreover, NGOs solicited finances from a variety of individuals and organizations that sought to see only reports. CCRDA was one of these NGOs that financed controversial projects of the government with funds raised from foreign donors. The military government reinvigorated the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC) that the imperial government had set up. This created a situation where CCRDA became no longer the only coordinator of the voluntary sector. CCRDA believed that both organizations stood for ensuring food security in the country. Thus, the organization felt the importance of assisting RRC. In its 1976 report, CCRDA described that “it [CCRDA] seeks to assist the government by sharing

the common problems concerning the welfare and development of the Ethiopian people” (CRDA 1977: 2). The risk was that RRC was not politically neutral. It was one of the main institutions to involve in politically and ideologically driven projects such as resettlement scheme throughout the 1980s. CCRDA stood firm with the government even by the time the government was sharply criticized by the international community. The government officials stated that the best strategy to ensure food security is to relocate people from famine prone areas to excess producing regions. A text addressed to Oxfam by RRC summed up this official justification of the government. It states that “[...] the settlement programme is and will continue to be a viable development scheme and designed and carried out by our government to improve the lot of our people and thereby extricate them from dependency” (RRC 1988a: 1).

When the majority of the people relocated in the 1980s and the way this resettlement was implemented are considered, the argument of the government was not persuasive. It was the imperial government that had introduced resettlement to ensure sustainable livelihood of poor people in Ethiopia. Resettlement was for the first time considered seriously during the Third Five Years Plan (1968-1973) of the imperial government. The plan stated that:

A gradual but accelerating shift in agricultural population will begin to be seen during the Third Plan from the present crowded Northern and Central highlands to the lowland areas and in a still longer run to the southwestern highlands and those parts of the southern highlands where population was not a problem (Bekelle 1988: 130).

Resettlement during the military period differed from that of the imperial government in two important respects. Firstly, resettlement during the military period was carried out by coercion. The government continuously argued that the scheme was being carried out voluntarily (RRC 1988b: 1). However, sources closer to the issue prove that this was not the case. The governor of Wollo from which the people were resettled in large number told officials of Oxfam and Save the Children Fund that “[...] given the natural attachment of people to their homes resettlement could not succeed as a voluntary activity” (RRC 1988c: 1). Secondly, the military government increased the magnitude of the program. From its inception in the early 1960 to 1974, the imperial government resettled only 20, 000 people in different parts of the country. With the creation of the Settlement Authority in 1976, the military government resettled 30, 298 people from 1976 to 1979 (Bekelle 1988: 128). In the context of the Ethiopian famine that occurred again in 1983-84, the president himself ordered the resettlement of 1 million people most of which to be from Wollo and Tigray. These two provinces were obviously hit by the famine much more than any other region in the country. However, famine was not the only factor. The two provinces remained areas where armed rebels mainly the Tigray People Liberation Front (TPLF) was operating. The government thus wanted to drain the social basis of rebels by relocating the people from these regions. Thus, it was part of the counter-insurgency strategy of the government (Goyder 1983: 1).

NGOs like Médecins Sans Frontières questioned the government’s use of force to resettle the people (Dodd: 1985: 130). However, the majority of NGOs including their coordination body, CCRDA, turned down the outcry of Médecins Sans Frontières (Ibid.: 30). In a position statement

that it circulated to its members, CCRDA condemned Médecins Sans Frontières for criticizing the government's policy that, it said, was sensible. Part of it reads "CRDA's [CCRDA's] position is that it does, through its members, support the general policy of resettlement as this is a defensible policy in the light of chronic drought conditions of northern Ethiopia" (CRDA: 1985: 1). CCRDA undermined also the accusation of Médecins Sans Frontières that the government violated gross human rights in the name of resettlement. Concerning this the same statement quoted above states further that "CRDA [CCRDA] members would point out that it is impossible to prove or disprove their allegations, as many might have died of starvations or related diseases if they have stayed either in their own villages or in the relief camps" (Ibid.: 1).

Two factors drove CCRDA to act along the official line. Firstly, the euphoria that the land reform generated led CCRDA to take the government as a partner. The leadership of CCRDA appreciated the land reform that, it believed, would lay down the ground for "community based development". This was because the land reform assured every adult a piece of land to sustain his/her livelihood. Partly motivated by this, the CCRDA shifted its priority to long term development activities. In order to reflect the priority, the organization abandoned its ad hoc name, Christian Relief Fund to Christian Relief and Development Association on 17 March 1975, signifying the influence of the radical land reform that had been announced on 4 March 1975 (CRDA 1977: 14). Secondly, internal factors nurtured a pro-government attitude among CCRDA's leadership. CCRDA pursued a cautious approach to its own members; it lacked sufficient authority to influence its own members due to sensitive theological differences. After the famine relief operation diminished in 1974/75, CCRDA asked its members to submit an annual plan in connection to rehabilitation activities. Many of its members believed that they did not have to submit their plan. CCRDA considered it as lack of harmony within its membership. CCRDA told its members with regret that the "CRF [precursor of CCRDA] does not speak with a corporate voice on behalf of its members" (Christian Relief Fund 1974: 5). Realizing its limitation, CCRDA told the RRC that "...each of our constituent members should be approached for information individually by the Commission [RRC]" (Ibid.: 1).

In acting along the official line, CCRDA claims to have "represented" the interests of members many of which were international NGOs. However, there were differences between the leadership of CCRDA and international NGO representatives with regard to the government's policy. While CCRDA fully supported the government's policy, international NGOs led by Médecins Sans Frontières were opposed to it. Two major issues framed the international NGOs' actions. Firstly, their close contacts with the rural communities brought them face to face with the effects of politically and ideologically driven resettlement, villagization, forced mobilization, restrictive marketing policies, exploitative taxation, forced conscription and an abusive authoritarian rule and so on (Rahmeto 1990: 52). The second issue was that the two major famines that occurred in 1974-75 and 1983-84 publicized Ethiopia to a larger extent. As a result, NGOs were able to mobilize huge resources from foreign donors (Ibid.: 44). The two factors put international NGOs at a clear dilemma. On the one hand, their own visions informed them to resist the government's actions that underdeveloped the general public and violated their rights. This was true partly

because they embraced a new strategic direction that intended to empower the people to suppress any form of repression. On the other hand, international NGOs were concerned that an attempt to resist the government policy would result in their expulsions and thus loss of the lucrative setting. This was particularly true after the expulsion of Médecins Sans Frontières from Ethiopia in 1985 for resisting the resettlement that created huge social crisis in the country (Dodd 1985:130). In the context of that dilemma, NGOs acted in the framework of the government's policies. The way Oxfam acted shows that in the context of the dilemma described earlier, international NGOs succumbed to the government and lend themselves to be its subservient.

While revolution was in the making in Ethiopia, Oxfam in Oxford strategized itself, driven by the teaching of Paulo Freire. Influenced by his concept of conscientization, Oxfam repositioned itself in 1975 in a way that emphasized the power of people. The new sense of purpose and strategic direction is summed up in one of its documents. It states that:

Oxfam believes in the essential dignity of people and in their capacity to overcome the problems and pressures which can crush and exploit them. Oxfam is a partnership of people who share these beliefs-people who, regardless of race, sex, religion or politics work together for the basic rights of food, shelter and reasonable condition of life (Oxfam in Jennings 2008: 121).

However, the military government stifled all self-help spirit in Ethiopia. Contrary to the essence of Oxfam's strategic direction, the revolutionary government ensured its totalitarian rule throughout the country. Oxfam knew very well that the space in which it could act to help the people did not exist. Frustrated by the situation, Stephen Lloyd, Deputy Country Representative of Oxfam in Ethiopia, reported that "[...] it is very difficult to find ways of working here which are not top down. The heavily directive nature of official intervention leaves little room to develop a particular milieu" (Lloyd 1987: 1).

On the one hand, the restricted environment created uncertainty about whether Oxfam would continue to exist in Ethiopia or not (Goyder 1983: 2). However, the Ethiopian famines of 1973-1974 and 1983-1984 generated a great deal of public generosity around the world. This created a situation where NGOs were able to mobilize huge resources. For instance, as a result of the Ethiopian famine of the 1980s Oxfam was able to generate £ 51.1 million, up from less than £ 20 million in 1983-84 (Hancock 1994: 4). Under this circumstance, it was unthinkable for the organization to leave Ethiopia. It could even be argued that the resources further drove Oxfam to act along official lines. In fact, an agreement was lacking within Oxfam on the extent to which the organization had to work with the government. Officials of Oxfam in Ethiopia who experienced the restrictive political environment submitted to the government. Many of the correspondences that the field director of Oxfam in Ethiopia addressed to the headquarters in Oxford attest to his apology. In 1982, the field director addressed a report to Oxfam in which he discussed the causes of food insecurity in the country. In his report, he pointed out that food insecurity was caused by inappropriate policy of the government. Part of his report says that "[...] production of all crops has been affected by the poor performance of the state farms and the lack of incentives to

producers to sell on the official market” (Goyder 1982). Let alone to argue with the government against these policies that deepened poverty, the field director advised the headquarters to go along with the official narrative. In the same report quoted here, the director said that “[...] it is convenient to give drought as the cause of these problems” (Ibid.). This was exactly what the government argued for. The government argued that drought was the ultimate factor for food insecurity in the country (Wolde Giorgis 1988: 155). The field director acted in line with the guidelines he was given by the headquarters in Oxford. However, officials at the headquarters were opposed to the extent to which the field director went to back up the government. In a book he published recently, one of the officials of Oxfam, Tony Vaux, said that “[...] in the early 1980s, Oxfam [...] became alarmed that its own representative was acting as an apologist for the government” (Vaux 2001: 49).

To summarize, NGO visions were seriously undermined not only by the state that ensured its hegemony in the name of socialism but also by pragmatism within NGOs themselves.

4.3 A New Order, a Quest for New Visions and State Action

In Ethiopia, as is true also in most African countries, NGOs of various types relied on donors such as the World Bank, the Department for International Development (DFID), Christian Aid, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation (NOVIB), Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED), INADES-Formation etc. Though they did supply assistance, these donors did not necessarily intend to influence the state to assure space for NGOs operation. This was true in the context of the Cold War and it contributed to the submission of NGOs in Ethiopia to the military government’s policies. This was because Western Governments put aside any policy that could antagonize countries that embraced Socialism in the Third World. This gave African leaders the chance to use that power for their own purpose regardless of the opinion of their own people (Ibid.: 52).

Towards the end of the 1980s, the context changed with the collapse of the socialist camp. The Ethiopian government that had remained dependent on the socialist camp could no longer get any form of assistance and as a compromise, it announced in March 1990 the “New Economic Policy” that promised liberalization of the economy. Soon, the rural people demolished rural governmental institutions with a great sense of relief (Rahmeto 1990: 10). In May 1991, the government fell and a new transitional government was set up by ex-rebels/Marxists who convinced donors that they had accepted neo-liberalism. The government introduced a transitional charter that promised the creation of a democratic Ethiopia where freedom of person and equality are assured (The Transitional Government of Ethiopia 1991: 49). The new constitution approved in 1995 that replaced the transitional charter confirmed these ideals and aspired for the creation of a political community, capable of building a democratic order on the basis of the rule of law. NGOs were considered to have a role in the process (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1995: 1).

Soon after they took state power, officials of the new government promised that NGOs would run their affairs freely anywhere in the country (Vaux 1991: 3). In what could be described as a positive development, the government tried to drive NGOs to adopt a long term perspective by inducing them to abandon their relief orientation (Agri-Service Ethiopia 1995: 12). To that end, the government introduced a set of legislations including a ban on importation of food from abroad (CRDA 1995). Moreover, in order to stifle free distribution of food, the government introduced a new national policy on disaster prevention, preparedness and response that called for the integration of food aid with development works (CRDA 1996: 3; Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission 1993: 5).

In order to implement the national policy and as part of its decentralization program, the government decentralized the RRC (Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission 1993: 5). The measures came to be a big blow for associations such as CCRDA that “represented” a substantial number of individual NGOs. As a response, the leaders of CCRDA resigned one after the other. This put the association at a critical condition. On this issue, the chairman of the association stated that “it is critical to ensure that the integrity of CRDA [CCRDA] is kept [maintained] during this time when we are facing big challenges and are in a difficult moment” (CRDA 1995). In order to adjust itself, CCRDA went through a strategic planning exercise and embraced a broader vision from 1997 on; it aspired for a poverty-free Ethiopia (CRDA 2008: 13). CCRDA’s quest for poverty alleviation had earlier been advocated by donors such as NOVIB and EED. On the eve of the collapse of the military government, representatives of NOVIB and EED met the Executive Committee of the CCRDA “to find the vision which CRDA [CCRDA] has for the future” (CRDA 1990). These representatives told the Committee also that “[...] sustainable development by local NGOs is their priority” (Ibid.). Thus, in order to carry forward its vision, CCRDA adopted capacity building for members and creating an enabling environment as its key strategic directions (Ibid.).

The agenda for poverty alleviation was pursued by other NGOs as well. ASE, like CCRDA, aspired for a poverty-free Ethiopia due to the revival of donors’ interest. Certainly, this revival had to do with the collapse of the military government. Few months after the regime change in May 1991, the Africa Desk officer of NOVIB, told the acting executive director of ASE that “Novib’s policy with regard to Ethiopia was based on the reality of the wars” (Couwenbergh 1991: 2). Thus, NOVIB increased its commitment in Ethiopia since the fall of the military government. This, again, was part of an increased interest that NOVIB pursued at the international level. As part of a development discourse that followed the end of the Cold War, NGOs were encouraged to bring issues to major international forums. In one of the forums organized by the United Nations Organizations, NOVIB argued that the end of the Cold War would give way to market led economic systems and the market would never address poverty and hunger. NOVIB concluded that global efforts should be geared towards poverty alleviation and equality of gender (NOVIB 1993: 1; NOVIB 1995: 1). Prior to that, NOVIB had consulted its partners in different parts of the Third World including ASE about poverty alleviation and gender equality. In a letter he addressed to NOVIB, the Executive Director stated that he fully agreed with the poverty alleviation agenda

(Worku 1996: 1). Consequently, ASE came up with a broader vision in 1996 that stated that ASE would aspire to see a happy/desirable rural Ethiopia, achievable by eradicating poverty (Agri-Service Ethiopia 2000b: 45).

Like many NGOs in the country such as CCRDA and ASE, Oxfam felt the influences of changes taking place in and out of Ethiopia. Soon after the “New Economic Policy” of the military government was announced in March 1990, a group of reviewers employed by the headquarters advised that Oxfam was to revitalize its commitment on poverty alleviation and “empowerment” of the people (Rahmeto 1990: 57). Motivated by the end of the Cold War, the headquarters of Oxfam conducted a strategic review and affirmed that Oxfam envisioned the alleviation of poverty in any part of the world through two strategic directions namely prevention of conflict and building sustainable livelihoods (Oxfam 2003: 1).

Although it was driving NGOs to embrace a broader vision, the new government was against their tendency towards “the rights-based approach to development” that gained global acceptance (Horn Consult 2003: 4). The new government showed clear antipathy towards NGOs. Its antipathy and the justification for this are shown in one of the ruling party’s organ issued in 1993. It states that:

We should not try to bring in outsiders to lead the peasants. In the rural areas, there are an increasing number of governmental and non-governmental development workers. These lower level members of the intelligentsia can undermine our influence and development programme if they oppose our political line (Addis Raey in Markakis 2011: 253).

The government’s antipathy towards NGOs had to do not only with the fact that NGOs subscribed to the rights-based approach to development but also with what NGOs had done in the early 1980s. In the early 1980s, major Western NGOs were involved in the “Cross Border Operation”, whereby relief assistance reached rebel-held territories in Tigray through the Sudan. They helped to relieve the people through the active participation of the Relief Society of Tigray (REST), the humanitarian wing of the TPLF. NGO participation in the “Cross Border Operation” violated international and national laws. Officials of the TPLF who were now in power were concerned that international NGOs might get involved in similar activities that would undermine the government. As a result, the government was anxious to strictly control NGOs, and to make use of the flow of aid funds themselves, rather than share it with independent NGOs (Markakis 2011: 253).

The antagonism of the government led to an “indigenization” of NGOs that refers to the process whereby expatriate employees of NGOs at the leadership positions were replaced by Ethiopians. Indigenizing NGOs goes as far back as their early existence in Ethiopia. In the 1960s and 1970s, expatriates were heavily represented in the leadership positions of NGOs. NGO leaders noted that this did not go along with their visions. This led them to varying degrees of indigenization. Differences did exist between NGOs with regard to the degree and pace of indigenization. ASE, for

instance, went through the earliest rapid and complete indigenization process. Replacing foreigners in the leadership positions started as soon as ASE started operation in 1969. However, it was only in 1977 that all leadership positions of ASE were taken over by Ethiopians (Personal interview with Mr. Worku: 2013, September 3). While it was achieved relatively easily in the case of ASE, indigenization was influenced by the origins of a number of other NGOs in Ethiopia. Although Ethiopians played an important role in the establishment of CCRDA, expatriates were for a long period much more visible in the leadership of CCRDA. This was because the executive committee was elected from the members of CCRDA, and foreign NGOs were predominant in Ethiopia. This remained a major concern of key personalities who played an active part in the establishment of CCRDA. Father Kevin Doheny was one of those personalities who worked hard to bring Ethiopians to leadership positions of CCRDA. This changed the situation towards the end of the 1970s and the early 1980s. Ethiopians filled in important positions in the executive committee and they became extremely assertive in their relation with expatriates. This could be seen from the debate that followed the decision of CCRDA to get involved in the relief operation in 1984–1985. Ethiopians, spearheaded by the chairman Asrat Gebre, argued that as an Ethiopian organization CCRDA had a direct responsibility to relieve Ethiopians stricken by the famine. Representatives of some 20 foreign NGOs argued that CCRDA's mandate should be limited to coordinating the work of its member organizations. In the context of this heated debate, the chairman reminded expatriates that they were in Ethiopia just to assist, and warned them not to argue further. He told them that:

Since this is [our] home, most of you have come to help, and since many of you are new to Ethiopia, we will not disappoint you with a schism. I hope this way of doing business is not repeated again simply because the thread that holds us together is very thin and weak (Gebre 1985: 3).

The outbreak of the famine itself resulted in the establishment of national NGOs. These NGOs became members of CCRDA and their representatives occupied positions in the executive committee, the general assembly as well as in the secretariat. However, the position of the executive director that symbolized CCRDA was still held by an expatriate. The indigenizing of CCRDA was completed after a further regime change in 1991. The new government developed a policy of reducing foreign influences. In response, Brother Augustus O'Keeffee, a French expatriate who had served CCRDA as executive director for 20 years, resigned in 1995 (CRDA 1995). A committee set up to recruit a candidate stipulated that his incoming replacement, the British expatriate John Roberts, was to hand his post on to an Ethiopian. John Roberts agreed that he would train an Ethiopian as his successor. However, this did not work out because the government refused to grant a work permit to John Roberts. It was under this circumstance that CCRDA came to have its first Ethiopian executive director, Kebedde Asrat, and with this it was fully Ethiopianized (CRDA 1997a). The policy that the government pursued to reduce foreign influences influenced international NGOs as well, which also went through some degree of indigenization in response. One of these was Oxfam, which recruited Ethiopian managers as well as Ethiopian employees. However, a report published in 1990 stated that, "[...] there is too big a

gap in experience and qualifications between the expatriates at management level and the Ethiopian staff" (Rahmeto et al 1990: 51). As in other parts of the world, Oxfam's office in Ethiopia came to have some degree of autonomy. This followed the regionalization process that started in the mid-1990s. As a result, Ethiopians started holding key leadership positions. For the first time in its history, Oxfam came to have the first Ethiopian resident representative, Gezahegn Kebede, who served Oxfam as Country Director from 1998 to 2003 (Personal interview with Mr. Terefe: 2013, October 10)

Indigenization granted NGOs marked confidence in dealing with the government. Ethiopians who now assumed important positions used to refer to the Ethiopian constitution approved in 1995 as a guarantee for free operation. Article 31 of this constitution states that as long as it was within the legal frameworks of the country, "every person has the right to freedom of association for any cause or purpose" (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1995: 10).

However, the right to freedom of association enshrined in the constitution (Ibid.: 10) was not exercised easily. The government took a series of administrative and legal measures to force NGOs abandon a rights-based approach to development. The Ethiopian Human Right Council, the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association, Plan International etc. were some of the NGOs that suffered from repressions of the government (Ministry of Justice 2004: 5). Yet, these measures do seem to have failed to achieve their objectives. Conversely, NGOs became more assertive in pursuing the rights-based approach to development. In a circumstance where the government took measures mentioned above, CCRDA and Oxfam sponsored a study that asserted, "[...] the rights-based approach had become the main development agenda in order to increase people's claim for their basic and human rights"(Horn Consult 2003: 4).

In order to have their voices heard by the government, NGOs formed a network that was used to voice the collective opinion of the sector. The NGOs saw, however, that their efforts alone would not bring about the desired change. From 1997 on, they approached what later came to be known as Donors Assistance Groups (DAGs). DAGs, which started out as a forum for information sharing among bilateral and multilateral organizations in Ethiopia, have later come to consider themselves as a "community" with a collective voice, and as a partner with, respectively, the Ethiopian government, NGOs and the private sector (Rahmeto et al 2008b: 19). The negotiations that took place between the Ethiopian governments on the one hand and NGOs and DAGs on the other hand resulted in a visible change with regard to the operational environment of NGOs. In line with the agreement reached between NGOs, donors and the government on 23 July 1998, the government shortened the lengthy bureaucracy of NGOs (Oxfam 1998: 3). This was followed by what was called the civil service reform program of the government. As part of this measure, the Ministry of Justice that used to register NGOs introduced two measures. Firstly, NGOs did not have to submit project proposals before they were officially licensed (Ministry of Justice 2002a: 1-2). Secondly, checking the backgrounds of international NGOs by Ethiopian missions abroad was no longer a requirement (Ibid.: 2).

The reform on NGO registration went hand in hand with negotiations between the Ethiopian government, the World Bank and IMF. The negotiations were on how NGOs could play a role in good governance; human rights, democracy and peace in the country, all the same fields of action that the government planned to work in (Rahmeto et al 2008b: 19). The preparation in 2002 of a Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper (PRSP) and of a document on decentralization of power to the district level set the context in which the role of NGOs was discussed. The final PRSP promised that NGOs could advocate on political issues. Similarly, the decentralization document assured NGOs to manage projects and have influence on officials at the local level (Ibid.: 102-105). Likewise, the Plan for Accelerated Development to End Poverty (PADEP), which was prepared jointly by NGOs and the government and ratified in June 2002, recognized the role NGOs could play in governance, namely human rights, democracy, and peace building. Various documents published after the PADEP also recognized that NGOs could work on governance. Alongside contributing to preparing the PADEP, NGOs argued that the Ministry of Justice should set a new legal framework for NGOs in Ethiopia. A series of draft proclamations prepared by the Ministry of Justice described how NGOs could work on governance issues. For instance, the preamble of the third draft described that:

ድርጅቶቹ በተለያዩ መስኮች የህብረተሰቡን ግንዛቤ ለማሳደግ፣ በዲሞክራሲ ስርአት ግንባታ፣ በሰብአዊ መብት ረገድ የሚያደርጉትን አስተዋጽኦ ማሳደግና የሚያንቀሳቅሱት ከፍተኛ ሃብትም በአግባቡ የታለመለት አላማ መዋሉን ማረጋገጥ አስፈላጊ በመሆኑ...በኢትዮጵያ ፌዴራላዊ ዲሞክራሲያዊ ሪፐብሊክ ህገ-መንግስት አንቅስ 55 /1/ መሰረት የሚከተለው ታውጇል”.

Its translation is that “Intending to promote the organizations’ [NGOs] role in raising awareness of the people, building democracy, and in human rights and to ensure that the huge resources they mobilize are spent for the intended purpose, the following is proclaimed as per Number 55 (1) of the Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia” (Ministry of Justice 2002b: 1).

The support NGOs received from donors and the goodwill shown by the government led NGOs to carry out a strategic shift and embrace political visions. CCRDA in 2003 conducted controversial debates within itself and envisioned not only a poverty-free Ethiopia but also an Ethiopia where the people are empowered to handle their own affairs (CRDA 2008: 16). Similarly, Oxfam came up with a conclusion that governance is a key strategic issue to create a poverty-free Ethiopia and aspired to see “Empowered citizens enjoying fundamental and democratic rights from an accountable government” (Oxfam 2008: 17). The same way, ASE argued that the people are to be empowered to make poverty eradication sustainable (Assefa 2006: 7).

Through their visions, the majority of NGOs went to the communities and taught citizens about their rights and monitored the 2005 national and regional elections. Concerned deeply by the new sense of NGO purpose, the government aimed to incapacitate them. In the post-election period, the government came up with the Ethiopian Charity and Society Act, which was approved in 2009. The law defines Ethiopian Residents Charity or Society as any organization that receives more than 10% of its funding from foreign sources, and then bars all such Civil Society Organizations

(CSOs) from working on human rights and governance issues (Rahmeto et al 2008b: 104). This was a heavy blow for the flourishing civil society sector in the country (Ibid.: 104).

To sum up, NGOs through the encouragement of outside donors envisioned not only the eradication of poverty through the empowerment of the people but also an Ethiopia where the human and democratic rights of citizens are respected. The government was against this and it in effect incapacitated NGOs in the country through a legislation put in place in 2009.

5 Conclusion

This case study from Ethiopia has shown that NGO visions are mediated by changing contexts in which actors with diverse interests operated. They were mediated not only by dominant actors but also by the NGOs themselves. While dominant actors such as the state negotiated NGOs visions of development driven by political and/or ideological factors, NGOs negotiated their own visions informed by practical issues (pragmatism). NGO leaderships are fully aware that action with a view to moving forward their visions is contingent on the context. In a context where the state developed its capability to control the public lives, NGO leadership succumbed to the state to ensure their organizational existence. In a situation where the state power is constrained namely through the interference of donors, they pursued their own visions. Thus, pragmatism is one of the factors that negotiated NGOs future orientations. It could thus, be theorized that NGOs are likely to become surrogates in the face of unrestrained state. In a situation where NGOs are one of the actors in not only articulating but also compromising their visions, it is better to conceptualize NGOs development visions as an ending dialogue between pragmatism and idealism.

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6.2 Oral Sources

Table 1: Informants (interviewed in Addis Ababa, 2012-2013)

Number	Name	Description
1.	Mr. Amanueal Asefa	Senior development expert at Agri-Service Ethiopia
2.	Mr. Getachew Worku	Formerly the Executive Director of Agri-Service Ethiopia
3.	Mr. Mesfin Tadesse	Operational Manager at Oxfam GB
4.	Mr. Mitiku Abebe	A management member at the Consortium of Christian Relief and Development Association

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