



## **Survey of African Organisations in London**

*An agenda for AFFORD's action*

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# Survey of African Organisations in London

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### What is AFFORD and why this report?

The crisis of African development will not ease unless ordinary Africans, wherever they are, take more responsibility for and control over their own destiny. The African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) was formed to connect Africans and their organisations abroad working for the development of Africa and her peoples directly with organisations on the continent working towards the same goals. A key concern for AFFORD is that, although very active in the development process in their own unique ways, Africans in the west are generally marginalised from development debate and activities initiated by more mainstream international non-governmental and other organisations. Rather than reinventing the wheel in tackling these issues and deciding how best to intervene, AFFORD took the view that the most useful and sensible way to proceed would be to listen to and learn from the existing African organisations—both African-led NGOs and less formal grassroots organisations—about why they were formed, what sort of activities they engaged in, what they perceived as their strengths and weaknesses, how involved they were or would like to be in development work in Africa, what sort of relationships they had with other organisations, and what their future plans were. Hence this report.

### Why read this report?

This report begins a much-needed dialogue: First, between different African organisations: how can we build on our strengths? how can we improve what we do? how can we work together to achieve common goals? what can we learn from each other? how can we learn from others with useful skills? how can we end the marginalisation of women in our organisations? how can we engage young Africans abroad in the development process? can we begin to find ways of harnessing the significant resources—capital and human—owned by Africans abroad in the interests of African development?

And second, between African organisations and more mainstream international development NGOs and other organisations: is the status quo in which your work and that of UK-based African-led organisations seem to operate in separate orbits satisfactory? do you want to establish partnerships with UK-based African-led organisations? which type of organisations? to achieve what goals? do you think of such African-led organisations as a likely drain on your time and resources? do you think long-term sustainable development is a realistic goal if you do not work with such organisations?

## **Some key findings and issues...**

### **African-led NGOs**

- are a vibrant, active and growing sector engaged in a diverse range of developmental activities
- some are more prone to "charitable interventions"
- many are keen to improve their management techniques, fundraising abilities and quality of project proposals submitted for funding
- will need to ensure that they and mainstream development organisations understand each other better if successful relationships are to emerge
- will need to be careful about seeking assistance from the European Commission and European governments without in any way endorsing their increasingly racist immigration and refugee policies
- bring far more to the table than demands for money: they bring their vision for the future, skills, commitment, resources and in-depth local knowledge
- mainstream international NGOs should not see the emergence of African-led NGOs as a threat or in "zero-sum game" terms but as an opportunity for meaningful partnerships with the potential to lift the development game and promote long-term sustainable change
- see the formation of a network of African organisations as a key goal to achieve in the short term that offers significant benefits which include breaking their isolation, learning from each other, exchanging tips and useful information and forming a common platform for lobbying

### **Informal African organisations**

- many are identity-based; bringing together people from the same ethnic group, village, region or even school
- they engage in a range of activities from welfare support for members and cultural events here in the UK to sending assistance of various kinds back home
- those with strong identity ties can often unify people of different social class which can sometimes help to break social exclusion and isolation of poorer and more vulnerable people
- but a disadvantage is that wider societal relations are often reproduced intact and reflected in the way these organisations operate
- thus women are often marginalised and relegated to supporting roles
- and young people's voices may go unheard
- although some organisations are well-run, members of others surveyed felt the need for better quality management and leadership was acute and called for training to address the need

- trust emerged as a key issue, organisations must be and show themselves to be scrupulously clean to win the support of ordinary Africans for their work
- some organisations have recognised this and set about establishing their credentials for integrity and cost effectiveness, others could learn from these examples
- supporting development work at home is a priority for some organisations although others say they would do more if they could overcome their funding and logistical difficulties
- some have sought, usually with little success, to work with international NGOs working in or near their home region
- UK-born and resident young Africans are a key area of concern for informal organisations; part of the strain in the relationship may stem from different conceptions of identity that parents and young people hold
- UK-based African parents need to take into account the often hostile external environment in which they must bring up their children
- nonetheless, young Africans are keen to be associated with their heritage although the terms may be subject to negotiation
- and UK-based young Africans have expressed a desire for a forum where they could meet other young Africans to share experiences and exchange ideas.

## SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

### What is AFFORD?

Before it was actually formed in 1994, the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD) was an idea germinating in the minds of many people. The puzzling paradox for many UK-based Africans concerned with the continent's development issues is this: at a time when there is increasing alarm about Africa's fate why are the majority of the Africans resident in the UK marginalised from mainstream development work and debates? One small African-run development charity had a first-hand experience of this paradox when, in the naive hope of reaching out to a wider number of Africans in the UK, it took a stand at Global Partnership '93, the annual exhibition of organisations concerned with international development work.

The small African charity was very disappointed—its members were surprised that so few Black people visited the three-day exhibition. Their own very existence—and that of many more African organisations they knew about—undermined any assumptions that Africans abroad were not concerned about what was going on back home, or indeed organising to do something about it. The truth was that despite the large numbers of Black people in London with direct and indirect links to many parts of the world where international development NGOs focus their energies, Global Partnership, in its marketing, press and publicity campaign, and networking, chose to target a different audience (by placing supplements in the *Independent* or *Guardian* newspapers, for instance, but not in the *Voice* or *West Africa*). Even to this day, four years later, very few Black people are aware of or attend Global Partnership. Surely by now, if the absence of Africans, Asians and Latin Americans was a major concern for the NGOs who attend year after year they would have put pressure on Global Partnership's organisers by now

to make a more concerted effort to broaden its audience. We are entitled to conclude that it is not a major issue for most of these NGOs.

### **Africa "recolonised"?**

A seminal edition of the journal, *Africa World Review* took up this and related issues early in 1994 by debating whether international NGOs were in the vanguard of attempts to recolonise Africa. That edition is still well worth a read, but briefly, it set the context thus: as Africa strains from the assault on it from Structural Adjustment Programmes, worsening terms of trade, competing demands of groups no longer receiving generous patronage, and the ever-pressing expectations of swelling populations for basic freedoms and needs, the international community's faith in the ability of the African state to deliver development is on the wane. Increasing amounts of overseas development assistance are being channelled via international NGOs, but as *AWR* noted, these NGOs are hardly any more accountable (although perhaps less repressive) to the people they serve than the states they replace. A number of articles interrogated this concern from different angles. One article in particular lamented the gulf between international NGOs' rhetoric of organisational capacity-building amongst their client communities, and the reality of these same NGOs' failure or unwillingness to engage with grassroots African organisations, at least in part because they felt uncomfortable with those structures.

Although this article was the catalyst behind AFFORD's formation, we have not formed the organisation to bash international NGOs or other development organisations. Far from it. At the centre of AFFORD's focus are Africans because we are convinced that the ultimate responsibility for the continent's welfare lies with Africans. AFFORD's mission is *to engage Africans and their organisations outside Africa directly with organisations involved in the processes of development on the continent; and to develop the skills and abilities of African peoples, either temporarily or permanently away from Africa, in ways that will contribute to Africa's development and enhance Africa's contribution to global development.* AFFORD's view is that for ordinary Africans to chart a path forwards for ourselves, we must give urgent attention to the practical task of developing organisations and relevant institutions, developing the capacity to sustain them, and establishing channels of communication and cooperation between grassroots organisations.

Thus, as an organisation we deliberately seek to be continent-wide in scope. So far members hail from Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and of course, Britain. In spite of differences in culture, background and experiences, as members of AFFORD we find ourselves united by a vision of what Africa can be and mean in the future, and what we can do to advance the process.

### **Africans' roots and routes**

We are often told these days that we now live in so-called postmodern times, some sort of world in which your identity is what you want it to be; where being an African, European, American is no longer as clear cut as it seemed to be. It is in such a climate that the issue of African identity is controversial, so we need to explain what we understand by it. Often when we explain what AFFORD is all about the retort comes back, "Oh, so you are excluding people from the Caribbean?" No, contrary to the

postmodernists' frequent charge, we do not think it is possible to identify a core set of features or values that are essentially African. By focusing on Africa we are aware of its complex history and of the diverse *routes* and *roots* of many of her descendants. Some of these descendants think of themselves as African or of African origin, and we agree with them and welcome them. Others do not and we respect their choice. Of course, for the vast majority of people that AFFORD deals with—for instance, those born on the continent or whose parents were and who maintain direct links with family and friends in Africa—this is a non-issue. Significantly, because we think of development as a people-centred process of positive social change, we believe that the issue of African development is relevant wherever African people happen to find themselves in the diaspora.

### **Why a study of African organisations?**

One trap that many organisations fall into that we wanted to avoid was that of reinventing the wheel. We knew that many Africans organised themselves, some to address welfare and cultural issues here in the UK, some to send monies and items back to their home villages and regions, and others to do development work in the more formal sense. We knew that wherever significant concentrations of Africans live—in parts of southeast London, for instance—diverse and vibrant cultures evolve, contributing to London's already rich tapestry of peoples and ways of life. The week may be hard and devoted to the struggle for survival, but some time at least is set aside for lighter, though no less important, tasks: naming ceremonies, weddings, funerals, a fundraising dance, a political meeting to discuss a crisis back home, and so on. Church halls, school halls, town halls throughout the boroughs of London are taken over by groups of Africans adapting to the challenges of living in 1990s Britain. From our own experiences and anecdotally we knew that these organisations have both strengths and weaknesses, we had hunches about what some of these organisations' priorities and most pressing concerns might be, we had a sense that the question of African youth was a difficult one that most communities are grappling with. Although not entirely uncritical as to what some of their limitations might be, we suspected that some of the identity-based organisations (e.g. ethnic associations) could play an expanded role in the development process. We also had some hunches about how AFFORD might intervene to enhance the contribution that organisations in this part of the diaspora make to Africa's development. But we did not want to proceed on the basis of hunches alone, no matter how well-informed. Hence the need for a study.

The study would help to support or refute AFFORD's starting hypothesis and help answer some specific questions: What type of African organisations exist? What sort of work do they do? How do they organise themselves? What are their strengths and weaknesses? Are they interested in working with other organisations in addressing African development issues? What were their perceptions of the needs of African youth in London? To what extent are young people's needs being met? Our hope was that out of this research process would emerge a clearer understanding of the issues facing African organisations and how AFFORD may better facilitate the process of development.

### **The diaspora and globalisation**

However, we believe the importance of the study goes far beyond helping AFFORD find its niche. Those concerned about development issues and the welfare of some of the most vulnerable people in this world tend to focus on the negative aspects of that much-discussed phenomenon, globalisation: the expansion of the neo-liberal market ideology to the exclusion of alternative approaches to economic development; the increasing commodification of more aspects of social life and the use of market relations to decide allocation of resources that were once allocated on the basis of need; the freedom of capital to search out highest rates of return regardless of territorial borders; the emergence of global (US-style) consumerism, even to relatively deprived regions. Arguably, Africa has felt the brunt of a particularly pernicious form of globalisation: states that have remained standing have succumbed to the pressure to sell off assets such as telecommunications authorities often at rock-bottom prices to foreign investors. Inevitably, in the absence of tough regulatory regimes, these new private enterprises will seek to maximise profit by serving the most affluent sectors of society. Those states that have imploded under the numerous pressures have seen the return of a buccaneering form of capitalism as well-armed warlords parcel off sections of resource-rich territory and sub-let them to the highest bidder, often to those that former British prime minister Ted Heath would have described as the unacceptable face of capitalism.

However, whilst not down-playing these negative aspects of globalisation, Cohen (1997) gives an upbeat assessment of what globalisation means for diasporas. Indeed, although he makes no claims for a causal link, he suggests that globalisation and diasporisation "go together" extraordinarily well (ibid.: 175). He proposes a typology of diaspora: victim, labour, trade, imperial, and cultural (p.x). The enforced nature—slavery and more recently wars and economic hardship—of much of African migration puts them in the category of victim diaspora. And his most positive remarks about the adaptability of diaspora to globalisation appear to apply to the trading diaspora. Most notable, in this respect, are members of the Chinese diaspora who, since 1979, have reconnected with their "villages and ancestral homes through the influential *guanxi*—elaborated networks of relatives, friends and associates" (ibid.: 161). According to Cohen, since 1979, China has received \$60 billion in foreign investments and about the same in loans, and overseas Chinese were responsible for a staggering 80% (i.e. \$96 billion) of the total sums involved.

At a time when most observers agree that Africa suffers from a chronic shortage of the right sort of foreign direct investment (in other words, long-term investment rather than "hot", footloose money looking for equity investment), what might be the implications of Cohen's suggestions for members of the African diaspora? What potential exists for Africans to help generate trade with and investment in their home regions, to transfer skills and knowledge? What comparative advantages do such people enjoy over other potential investors and traders? What institutional arrangements would best facilitate this sort of development? Whilst we do not claim to have comprehensively answered or even addressed these questions, we do hope that this report contributes to this important debate. Moreover, we hope that this report helps to fuel a series of dialogues—amongst African organisations and between African organisations and more mainstream international NGOs, and other development decision makers and practitioners.

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## Report's structure

Following this introduction, section two of the report outlines the study's methodology and process. Section three contains the main findings of the research. On the basis of preliminary investigations and existing knowledge, we made an analytical distinction at the outset of the study between two types of African organisation: development oriented organisations which tend to be more formal insofar as they more obviously parallel northern NGOs involved in development work, and informal associations. We assumed formal organisations to be those that have offices, paid staff and are often (but not necessarily) registered as charities. They are often formally engaged in development work in Africa; in some cases they are engaged in development work amongst Africans in the UK. The beneficiaries of formal organisations' work often fall in constituencies outside their main membership. Informal organisations, on the other hand, tend not to have offices or paid staff, relying as they do on use of members' homes and volunteers' time. They tend to be identity-based movements as they are often formed by and for people from the same village or region, or belonging to the same ethnic group (see Table 1). We made the distinction based on the early assumption that informal organisations are the more marginalised of the two groups and more likely to benefit from any intervention that AFFORD is likely to make. The first part of section three discusses our findings on formal organisations. The second part of section three focuses on informal organisations. The third and final part of section three focuses on the provision of services for African youth in London. Bearing in mind that the research exercise's primary purpose has been to guide AFFORD's future work, where appropriate recommendations for AFFORD to consider are found in a section immediately following the pertinent finding. Finally, section four of this report presents some conclusions and a number of additional recommendations.

| <b>Characteristic (Type)</b> | <b>Beneficiaries</b>  | <b>Activities</b>                                      | <b>Motivation for formation</b>                             | <b>Organisational basis</b>  | <b>Offices and paid staff?</b> | <b>Funding</b>  | <b>Charity registration?</b> |
|------------------------------|---|--|---|--|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Informal/<br>community based | Often members or extensions of self e.g. kin members back home or | Examples include meeting members' welfare and cultural | Self-help; sometimes in reaction to external threats; often | Largely identity-based e.g. same ethnic group, town or region, same school | Rarely                         | Often self-funded from members' contributions and fundraising | Rarely                       |



|                                     |                               |  |  |   |             |                                 |             |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|--|---|-------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
|                                     | current pupils of old school  | needs; providing material support for a home village, old school, hospital, etc.; resources sent home often amount to a charitable donation                                      | ostensibly apolitical  |   |             | events                          |             |
| Formal African-led development NGOs | Usually external to the group | More inclined to pursue state of the art development approaches e.g. emphasising skills transfer, real empowerment etc.; and more amenable to the influence/priorities of donors | Often proactive with an explicit commitment to social change, redistribution of power and resources within society | Likely to be more politically oriented e.g. human rights; more ideological; also likely to adhere to some notion of professionalism | More likely | Grant-funded, some self-funding | More likely |

**Table 1: Informal and formal African organisations compared.**

This taxonomy is far from perfect. For instance, it is unclear where the numerous refugee organisations, or those devoted to health issues such as HIV/AIDS, or immigration, etc. should fit. We have devoted less attention to these types of organisations partly to make our research task more manageable, and partly because, whilst these organisations most certainly do valuable and vital work, they often owe their existence to local authorities that have a statutory duty to fund provision in particular areas. Thus, being funding-driven, the form of organisation will often tend to suit the needs of the funders rather than be a genuine reflection of the way that members of these African communities would like to arrange their own affairs.

## SECTION TWO: METHODOLOGY & PROCESS

### Organisation

From the outset our aim was to organise the research in such a way as to make it a collaborative effort and to exploit the talents and knowledge of AFFORD members, many of whom have direct experience of organising within their own communities, of working in the formal development sector, and of conducting various kinds of research. In

addition to exploiting and enhancing AFFORD's skill base, we also believed that this approach would enable us to extract maximum value from our limited research budget. The overall effort was spearheaded by a Lead Researcher, who was supported by the Research Support Team (RST). The Lead Researcher also had access to a team of volunteers—mainly, but not exclusively, AFFORD members—to whom were allocated specific research tasks. The RST took responsibility for defining the study's terms of reference (see Appendix A). We had initially hoped to conduct the entire exercise in-house and thus assigned a member with the task of Lead Researcher. We experienced some practical difficulties with this arrangement, however. For instance, AFFORD members suddenly found themselves having to treat a colleague and founder member of the organisation as an employee and oversee his work. Likewise, this member had to manage the activities of other members, the volunteers. After an early phase of work and following group discussions we agreed to seek the services of an outside person as Lead Researcher and use that original member's skills within the RST. Nonetheless, before the changeover, our member/Lead Researcher did produce an interim report of findings that was a useful contribution to the work carried out subsequently.

Finding an outside Lead Researcher, however, was easier said than done. For a start, we were asking for a lot: we wanted a skilled, experienced researcher to undertake a fairly comprehensive and demanding task, we wanted an immediate start, and we were offering a pittance. We had one abortive start with a two-person team who found first, that they had bitten off more than they could chew and second, that AFFORD's style was a little too collaborative and hands-on for their liking: They had expected to be left to get on and do the job in the manner they saw fit whereas we found it a little difficult to let go and sought to participate and offer as much guidance and advice as possible. Our approach left our appointees feeling that we lacked trust in their ability to conduct the work although this was certainly not our intention. We learned our lessons from that unfortunate episode and made sure that with our final and thankfully more successful appointment we took more of a hands-off approach to allow the Lead Researcher a freer reign.

Our efforts were also beset by personal tragedy for a member of AFFORD who had been scheduled to take responsibility for a large element of the work. These problems have had some negative implications for the study conducted. The most notable of these are the significant delays introduced into the process and disruptions to the workflow; also, the study does not encompass the scale and depth that we had originally hoped for.

## **Approach**

In brief, the rationale behind our approach to the study was to establish a broad overview of African organisations and then home in on a select few to gain an in-depth understanding of their operations, aspirations, challenges and potential. The study was conducted in four phases: (1) The first phase of desk research consisted of an initial trawl of libraries, embassies and high commissions, existing known databases from organisations such as the Charity Commission, Charity Projects, the Africa Centre, and other contacts. These sources, in the main, tended to provide contact details of formal although some (embassies and high commissions, for instance) did provide data on informal organisations as well. Further information about informal organisations came from tapping into networks of personal contacts, from advertisements for social functions

and fundraising events placed by informal organisations in publications such as *West Africa* magazine, and so on. This first phase also consisted of an overview of relevant theoretical and empirical literature pertaining to African organisations.

| Source type            | Universe | Contact | Telephone/<br>questionnaire<br>response | Focus group<br>participation<br>(number of<br>organisations) | Indepth<br>interviews |
|------------------------|----------|---------|---|--|-----------------------|
| Informal organisations | 202      | 130     | 32                                      | 8  | n/a                   |
| Formal organisations   | 32       | 32      | 14                                      | 5  | n/a                   |
| Key informants         | n/a      | n/a     | n/a                                     | n/a  | 3                     |

Table 2: The research process

(2) During the second phase of the study we sent out questionnaires or conducted structured interviews by telephone using the questionnaire as a basis. As Table 2 shows, a total of 46 organisations responded, 32 informal and 14 formal organisations. The response rate from informal organisations was very low and this inevitably has consequences for the sort of claims we can make within this study. The results presented here cannot justifiably claim to be representative of the entire universe of informal African organisations operating in London, let alone the whole of the UK. Nevertheless, we argue that whilst the findings should be treated with caution, the study raises pertinent issues that a range of actors will need to address.

The questionnaire (see Appendix B) was designed to provide different categories of information:

- • basic contact details;
- motivation for the organisation's formation and basic historical information;
- basic organisational data: size, type of activities, size of membership, frequency of meetings, leadership structure, sources of funding;
- organisation's main strengths and difficulties faced, as perceived by the organisation;
- range of activities (actual or desired) for young people;
- range of activities (actual or desired) to promote development activity in Africa;
- level of contacts (actual or desired) with other organisations
- future plans.

Appendix C contains a full inventory of African organisations surveyed.

(3) The third phase of the study consisted of two separate focus group meetings, one with a group of representatives from formal organisations and the other with informal organisations' representatives. The aim of the focus group meetings was to explore in more depth, and with a select group of individuals, some of the issues raised in response to the questionnaires and telephone interviews. These meetings also presented an opportunity to foster horizontal communications between representatives facing similar issues. In both meetings we used Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques, and for the first one with formal organisations, used the services of a facilitator from the Institute of Development Studies. We embraced PRA because, at one level, it stands as a philosophy that AFFORD strongly identifies with: of "self-critical awareness and commitment to the weak and poor" (Chambers 1997: 104). At the more practical level, PRA is an evolving family of approaches and methods in which value is placed on "decentralisation, open communications and sharing knowledge, empowerment, diversity and rapid adaptation" (ibid.: 197). Chambers (ibid.: 104-6) identifies PRA's three pillars: the behaviour and attitudes of outsiders (i.e. AFFORD) who facilitate rather than dominate; the methods which shift emphasis from closed to open, from individual to group, from verbal to visual, and from measuring to comparing; and partnership and sharing of information, experience, between insiders and outsiders, and between organisations.

Representatives from organisations were invited to focus group meetings on the basis of responses to questionnaires and telephone interviews. We were particularly keen to interact with individuals who appeared to be especially active in their respective communities on the grounds that they would likely be able to shed light on a wide range of issues pertaining to organising amongst Africans in London. Full reports of both meetings can be found at Appendices D and E.

(4) The fourth phase of the study consisted of indepth unstructured interviews with key informants. The aim here was to broaden and deepen our understanding of the dynamics organising within African communities by engaging with individuals with a commitment to social change and a wealth of experience of working within their communities.

### **Limitations of the study**

Mention has already been made of the delays and disruption as a result of personnel difficulties. In addition, fiscal and time constraints meant we could not delve into issues as deeply as we would have liked or investigated as many organisations as was ideal. Also, we considered it prudent to limit this survey to the London region in order to make the task more manageable. Furthermore, we found ourselves unable to tackle the youth issue in anything like the depth we had originally intended as is discussed in section three below.

In sum, our methodological approach is neither a broad statistical survey nor an indepth case study. We have sought to adapt a method that best serves AFFORD's purposes which, as already stated, are to support or refute our hunches as to how best the organisation can fulfil its mission and to identify potential partners in moving forwards. Whilst we believe the findings retain their validity, the results should be read with this caveat in mind. Furthermore, within this report we seek through analysis and reflection to develop those findings. The raw data itself can be found in the appendices.

## SECTION THREE: FINDINGS

### African-led development NGOs

#### Origins and formation

Charity Projects, the organisation that disburses grants raised from Comic Relief fundraising activities, has noticed an increase over the last five years of what it describes as African-led NGOs (i.e. the full range of non-governmental organisations that happen to be set up and run by Africans within which group, of course, falls the ostensibly development-oriented organisations that are our specific interest here). We could speculate that the upsurge of conflicts in Africa, and the ongoing economic crisis afflicting many states may be two obvious factors explaining the increase in African-led NGOs. Action for Children for instance, was set up by UK-resident Sierra Leoneans to aid child war victims in the aftermath of the conflict that started in that country in 1991. Although Britain has received refugees from Sierra Leone in recent years, it has been, in the main, longer established individuals (though with direct links to the regions most directly affected by the war) who have marshalled their energies and resources to provide assistance to the children. Similarly, Oromo Relief Association was formed in response to unrest in Ethiopia that affected Oromo peoples and resulted in their migration to Djibouti and other neighbouring countries.

The formation of the above two organisations can be explained by the presence in this country of people touched directly by the emergence of trauma and tragedy in their areas of origin, and, crucially, their ability to organise to mount a response. However, the formation of other African-led development NGOs needs to be seen in the wider context of African settlement and assimilation into UK society. Aid for Children with Disabilities (AFICIA) was formed by a Ghanaian UK resident alarmed at the plight of disabled children back home in Ghana. The founder has been able to tap into a network of social contacts to arrange a charity ball at a classy London hotel to launch the organisation, and raise funds and consciousness amongst well-intentioned citizens in this country. The urge to "do something", to dip one's hands into one's pockets in the face of human suffering is surely a commendable and humane trait. Nonetheless, charitable interventions do have their attendant dangers e.g. in creating a dependency and disempowering beneficiaries. Middle class Africans are no less prone to these dangers than their European counterparts and will need to be as vigilant to ensure that their interventions are appropriate. In fact, examples abound of well-intentioned organisations making inappropriate donations. For instance, there was the case of the Ghanaian group that sought to take maximum advantage of health service cutbacks and hospital closures in this country by purchasing beds and sending them to a hospital in Ghana. Whilst medical staff at the hospital appreciated the gesture, they did not find the beds too useful because they were so high that many of the weakened patients needed a strong, able-bodied person to lift them onto the bed. In that case, a more appropriate contribution would perhaps have been to send money to the hospital which could then have commissioned local carpenters to make beds of an appropriate size (and which would have had the added benefit of generating local jobs).

Other African-led NGOs have more of a conventional development orientation and perhaps could serve as models for charitable organisations, should they wish, to perhaps emulate in making a transition to a more development orientation. Akina Mama

wa Afrika is run by African women here in the UK and serves African women both the UK and on the continent. The organisation focuses on community development education and research activities in support of these women.

### **AFFORD's action agenda**

AFFORD could consider initiating exchanges and discussion between the two types of African-led development NGOs to explore whether it is possible to evolve some sense of best practice in development work and to conscientise activists as to the relative strengths and limitations of charitably oriented interventions on behalf of beneficiaries either in Africa or here in the UK.

AFFORD could explore ways of making more easily accessible the wealth of experience and knowledge about good development practice now available to interested African organisations.

### **Management**

Like many other types of organisation, African organisations reported difficulties in raising funds to pay for overheads and full-time staff with administrative responsibilities. These difficulties mean that many organisations are run on a voluntary basis by coordinators who must hold down full-time jobs elsewhere.

Our research suggests that African-led developmental NGOs are very keen to improve their management techniques, partly in order to improve the quality of their work, and partly to improve their access to funds. Much of the discussion during the first focus group meeting revolved around the recognition of the need for the relationship with funders to be characterised by quality from African organisations. This starts from delivering a well-considered and argued funding proposal which addresses whatever criteria the funders have set and also includes delivering a well-managed project with careful monitoring and evaluation along the way. It is important to note that these views emerged out of the indepth discussions and were strongly endorsed by all participants at the focus group meeting. Whilst criticisms may be ventured at funders that sometimes set criteria that act as a barrier to participation to African-led NGOs, a renegotiation of these relationships will probably best proceed when African organisations have established their credibility by successfully working on funders' terms in the first instance.

### **AFFORD's action agenda**

AFFORD could usefully facilitate training in organisational development for African-led development NGOs. We could venture that the PRA techniques used seem particularly well suited to this task. The African organisations that we spoke to are very much aware of the need to continually improve management capabilities (as all sensible organisations operating in a changing environment are). Yet they have tended not to avail themselves of the training that already exists. We suggest that pertinent issues here could include targeting and access, and incentives and motivation. On targeting and access, small organisations such as the ones in question here may not appear as likely clients to some of the training organisations. Also, courses may not be well suited to people who have full-time jobs and other commitments if they are held during the



week rather than evenings and weekends. Furthermore, initially, at least, African organisations may tend to interact in small, safe groups that understand and respect their cultural differences. Individuals involved with these organisations may be dealing with a range of other issues that make them wary of getting too close to anything that smacks of officialdom. Therefore, AFFORD could explore ways of facilitating training as close to the grassroots as is practicable.

AFFORD could also consider ways that it could facilitate structured exchanges between funders and groups of African-led development NGOs to address more fundamental issues of ensuring that such organisations are not inadvertently excluded from their operations.

There are also issues to consider with regards to organisations' incentives and motivation to improve their management techniques and capacity. The danger always exists that where funders have a statutory requirement to disburse funds, they create a supply-driven environment in which people, robbed of their own initiative, simply respond. Such a supply-side push can lead to the distorted growth of organisations with little or no incentive or motivation to improve their management capability. Here we are merely pointing to a potential risk rather than accusing all statutorily funded organisations of incompetence and unprofessionalism.

## **Funding**

The more established African developmental NGOs such as Akina wa mama Afrika raise funds from a variety of sources that is similar to their northern counterparts whilst the smaller ones such as Action for Children tend to rely almost exclusively on holding fundraising events and membership dues. In this respect at least, then, the likes of Action for Children are similar to informal African organisations.

The most common difficulty expressed by NGOs was that associated with fundraising successfully. However, a Charity Projects report indicates that the approval rate for applications from African NGOs was 39% compared with a rate of 42% for all proposals. This may suggest that when African organisations do apply for project funding to institutions that are particularly inclined to work with them they fare pretty well. On the other hand, anecdotal evidence from a source that deals with funding applications within the UK government's Department for International Development (what was the Overseas Development Administration) suggests that proposals from African organisations are often unfocused and fail to clearly address the funding criteria for the project in question. Although the issue requires further investigation we may speculate that work is required on both sides. If they are interested in working in partnership with African developmental NGOs and nurturing that sector, funders may need to think carefully about how they structure projects to best play to African organisations' strengths. Such institutions need to at least pose the question to themselves as to whether they would attract better proposals from African organisations if they were working within a framework that captures the essence of some of these organisations' own visions.

For their part, African organisations must do far more to ensure that they understand funders' own requirements and can communicate that understanding clearly. The good news is that African organisations themselves have recognised their deficiencies in this

area and have identified fundraising and proposal writing as areas in which they wish to receive training.

### **AFFORD's action agenda**

AFFORD could usefully facilitate training sessions for African developmental NGOs. This might entail assessing the appropriateness of existing training courses for these organisations and making them aware of these facilities. Or it might entail the creation of such training if this path is more appropriate.

AFFORD might also consider initiating a dialogue with funding organisations to establish what their attitudes towards funding African organisations are. Anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that negative perceptions of African organisations may be circulating within the community of funding organisations. Often one or two bad experiences can be blown way out of proportion but serve to tarnish the reputation of a whole category of organisations.

### **Development Projects in Africa**

The African developmental organisations surveyed carry out a diverse range of projects in Africa. They include activities to protect the interests of pastoralists in the horn of Africa; income generating activities for Oromo refugee women in Khartoum, Sudan; the distribution of Somali literature in the horn; awareness raising on human rights abuses in Nigeria; leadership training for women in Kampala, Uganda; and assistance for child war victims in Sierra Leone.

The organisations surveyed perceived one of their strengths to be an awareness or first-hand knowledge of the problems encountered in development work in Africa and an ability to arrive at more appropriate solutions than western NGOs. Doubtless the argument has considerable merits, particularly when we think of those western NGOs that do not work with local partners in Africa. Also, when we think of development not as a series of projects with start and end points, but as an ongoing process of positive, human-centred and directed social change, along with associated institutional development, then the benefits of having Africans as deeply involved and immersed as possible in that process appear more evident.

Nonetheless, despite its commonsensical appeal (or perhaps because of it) the argument of African NGOs' strengths over western NGOs is one that we must view and deploy with extreme caution.

- "But if knowledge is to be transferred and adjusted to poor countries in a constructive way, it is necessary that it is transferred by people with a thorough familiarity with actual technique as well as with the socio-cultural environment into which such technique is to be implanted. Where are we to find people with such a double competence? Here [in Sweden], among our refugees and immigrants. By involving them in foreign aid work we have a unique chance to do something constructive for both the foreign aid and immigration policies. The time during which refugees need protection should be used for education and practical experience within areas in which their native countries need experience." (Deland 1997: 56)

Writing in a recent edition of the journal *Race & Class* entitled 'Europe: the wages of racism', Mats Deland demarcates the contours of 'The cultural racism of Sweden'. In the passage reproduced above he is quoting Ingrid Björkman, a fellow in literary theory who has written two books on nation-building in Kenya. However, Deland argues that "Björkman is the main example in Sweden of those who have moved from the leftist, social anthropologist perspective of the 1970s on how to defend the cultures of the Third World, to the view that cultures often work best if they are not mixed at all" (ibid.: 52). Björkman is part of one of a few groups (others have closer links with extreme right and fascist movements) who are architects of a new racist discourse in Sweden and who argue, using the separatist logic outlined above, against the granting of permanent permission to immigrants to stay in Sweden.

Indeed, this development in Sweden has echoes throughout western Europe and arguably is a centrepiece of the European Commission's immigration policy that this particular edition of the journal *Race & Class* documents in chilling detail. African developmental NGOs will understandably wish to avail themselves of any funding from the EC or other authorities for training, development projects, and so on, but they will not want to subscribe or in any way support any underlying racist connotations. We can speculate that many Africans and their organisations face this dilemma throughout Europe, perhaps even more acutely than do UK-based organisations.

It might be more helpful at this stage to think of African and western NGOs working in partnership together, deploying their relative strengths in the name of African development. A case of "both and" rather than the mutually exclusive "either or". Western developmental NGOs working in Africa have spoken of partnership, of capacity building within African communities but have in general failed to turn that rhetoric into reality by establishing relationships with African communities in the UK. One notable exception to this generalisation is Concern Universal (CU), a small Catholic charity based in Chatham, Kent. CU has long recognised the potential benefits of working with UK-based migrants from the African countries in which it has operations. In line with this policy it plays a supportive role to Action for Children to complement its own rehabilitation work with former child soldiers in Sierra Leone. Further work is required to assess the benefits for the two organisations and for development in Sierra Leone and to evaluate what lessons can be applied to partnerships between other developmental NGOs from Africa and the west.

Realists (or cynics, depending on your point of view) may argue that it is not surprising that western NGOs have so far failed to seize the opportunity to work with African-led UK-based developmental NGOs given the potential threat that such organisations could pose to them. Perhaps western NGOs fear that high-profile images of competent, capable Africans taking care of their own affairs may raise difficult questions about which organisations should actually receive tax-payers' hard-earned pounds and people's charitable donations. Such competition versus cooperation thinking suggests that western NGOs fear that they may end up competing with African organisations for the same funding. But is this really a zero-sum game? We argue that African organisations bring to the table far more than a demand for money. In addition to their skills, knowledge, understanding and long-term commitment to African development, they also bring the involvement and interest of members of their respective communities. We believe that western NGOs should look more closely at the two sides of the equation they may have quietly conjured up in their minds.

## AFFORD's action agenda

AFFORD should seek out other African developmental organisations, especially umbrella groups, throughout the European Union to begin a dialogue around assessing the implications of the EU's immigration policy and how this affects the work and funding of African organisations. Along with these groups AFFORD should aim to develop and propose an alternative to the currently suspect framework for supporting and working with African-led developmental NGOs.

AFFORD should seek ways to explore the lessons to be learned from the collaboration between Concern Universal and Action for Children, and other such collaborations. To what extent have they been of mutual benefit to the organisations? To what extent have they served the wider aim of development in Sierra Leone? What are the transferable lessons and conclusions from these experiences and how can they be applied elsewhere?

AFFORD should seek to make western NGOs aware of the potential mutual benefit that could accrue from working in partnership with African-led developmental NGOs. AFFORD should explore ways of disabusing western NGOs and African-led NGOs of any vestiges of "zero-sum" thinking.

## Networking

No active network of African-led developmental NGOs is in operation at present. The organisations surveyed put great emphasis on networking amongst similar African organisations as a key objective. Participants at the focus group meeting with African-led developmental NGOs raised a number of issues with regards to networking:

- *Develop common goals:* Participants cautioned against assuming that African-led NGOs share common goals. Rather it would be better to explore these goals and, where possible and appropriate, harmonise them and then devise strategies for achieving them. Perhaps one goal would be agreement on a conceptual framework of what development should be about which still leaves plenty of scope for individual organisational initiative and interpretation.
- *Share experiences and learn from each other:* If the trend in increase in numbers of African-led NGOs continues, and if the role of these organisations expands, then newer NGOs would benefit from learning about the pitfalls and mistakes that more experienced African NGOs could alert them to, as would existing organisations tackling new tasks. Some Africans may be surprised to learn that other Africans from half way across the continent are dealing with similar issues in spite of cultural, political, geographical and historical differences. In many cases it may be more appropriate to think of development outside the framework of national politics and in this sense more cross-border linkages between peoples could have a powerful effect.
- *Break the isolation of African-led NGOs:* Knowing that other like-minded people are trying to achieve similar goals and facing similar challenges would act as a morale booster for many people involved in the burgeoning African-led NGO sector.

- *Develop a common platform for lobbying and advocacy work:* There is strength in numbers and collectively African-led NGOs could contribute to and help shape some of the debates about African development from which they are currently excluded.

The emergence of a dynamic and effective network of African-led developmental NGOs could be one of the most significant developments in development practice. Such a network could empower people in their bid to change their reality. More than training or funding, a functioning network could serve to create a paradigm shift in African development thinking and practice.

### **AFFORD's action agenda**

A call for AFFORD to facilitate a network of African-led NGOs was a clear outcome of this research exercise and as already noted above, success in this venture could be one of AFFORD's most significant steps in fulfilling its mission.

However, AFFORD should be mindful of the attendant dangers. The most obvious of these is the creation of a network simply because it is a fashionable thing to do. Despite the loud calls for AFFORD get things going, unless the network develops from the bottom up and is shaped by those who are to derive the most benefit, it is likely to fall into disuse very quickly.

One strategy AFFORD could usefully consider is to identify a handful of dynamic change leaders amongst African-led NGOs who recognise the potential benefits of a functioning network and who would be willing to invest time and effort to get things going and be points of contact within their own organisations. This group could perhaps form some sort of steering committee to drive the networking initiative, act as a think-tank to identify innovative ideas, put them into practice, evaluate the results and find ways of diffusing them to others where appropriate.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, the African-led developmental NGO sector is fast-growing, diverse and vibrant and is likely to play an increasingly important role in Africa's development. Organisations within the sector will need to be careful to avoid a number of pitfalls. Most notable amongst these are the danger of repeating past mistakes of inappropriate developmental interventions and the risk of inadvertently supporting new patterns of racist policy and practice in Europe thus undermining many of the achievements of past anti-racist struggles. Nonetheless, organisations within this sector are self-critically aware of their limitations and keen to avail themselves of better training and support in order to improve their skills and capabilities. The potential offered by African-led developmental NGOs to spearhead an entirely new development praxis in Africa requires western NGOs and other developmental institutions to take a critical look at their policies and practices to ensure that they are best positioned to work in partnership with this emerging sector. Most importantly, organisations within the sector are keen to network amongst each other with the potential for the creation of a much stronger sector.

## **SECTION THREE: FINDINGS**

### **Informal or community-based African organisations**

To repeat an earlier definition, we defined informal organisations as those which tend to rely on the use of members' spare time and private homes rather than paid staff or rented office space. They tend to be identity-based movements as they are often formed by and for people from the same village or region, or people belonging to the same ethnic group. We made the distinction based on the early assumption that informal organisations are the more marginalised of the two groups and more likely to benefit from any intervention that AFFORD is likely to make.

Informal African organisations far exceed African-led developmental NGOs in number. As part of this survey we identified the addresses of 202 London-based informal organisations from 18 countries (see Table 3). We would expect there to be many more organisations in other parts of the UK where large numbers of Africans live (although some of these organisations will have sister or parent branches in London). Neither do we claim to have identified all the organisations even in London. Informal organisations present particular challenges to researchers trying to track them down precisely because they are operated from private homes, members may work during the day and are difficult to locate even in the evenings. Also, these members move, change their telephone numbers, leave the organisation and hand over responsibility to others, are extremely wary of unknown researchers asking lots of questions over the telephone about what they do, and so on.

| <b>Country / region</b> | <b>No of organisations on inventory</b> | <b>No of organisations which completed questionnaires</b> | <b>No of organisations involved in youth work</b> | <b>No of organisations involved in development work in region of origin</b> |
|-------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Algeria                 | 1                                       |   |   |   |
| Angola                  | 2                                       |   |   |   |
| Eritrea                 | 12                                      | 1   | 1   |   |
| Ethiopia                | 17                                      |   |   |   |
| Gambia                  | 2                                       |   |   |   |
| Ghana                   | 79                                      | 3   | 2   | 2   |
| Ivory Coast             | 3                                       | 3   | -   | 2   |
| Kenya                   | 1                                       | 1   | 1   | 1   |
| Mauritius               | 2                                       |   |   |   |
| Morocco                 | 5                                       | 1   | 1   | -   |
| Nigeria                 | 12                                      | 8   | 1   | -   |
| Sierra Leone            | 8                                       | 6   | -   | 5   |
| Somalia                 | 44                                      | 3   | 2   | -   |
| Sudan                   | 4                                       |   |   |   |
| Tanzania                | 1                                       |   |   |   |
| Togo                    | 1                                       |   |   |   |
| Uganda                  | 3                                       | 2   | 1   | -   |



|       |   |   |   |   |
|-------|---|---|---|---|
| Zaire | 4 | 4 | 3 | 1 |
|-------|---|---|---|---|

Table 3: Informal African organisation surveyed.

The table shows a bias towards particular countries such as Ghana, and the West African region in general. It is quite reasonable to surmise that West Africans from countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Sierra Leone who have a long history of travel to and settlement in Britain and who have now been joined by a more recent influx of compatriots would be predisposed to form informal organisations. However, this factor alone cannot explain the skewed nature of the data. It is also the case that our excellent contacts within the Ghanaian communities, say, were not matched by those amongst Nigerians. Although this type of work is subject to the law of diminishing returns, further time and resources would provide a far more comprehensive view of informal organisations amongst Africans in London.

### Origins

Community groups can be an expression of "primordial ties" involving blood, kinship and ethnic relations which bind people together and help them locate themselves in relation to others. Alternatively, other informal African organisations represent communities of interest in the sense that people from a particular school may club together to support their alma mater.

Though these "primordial ties" ties exist all over the world, according to Hoben and Hefer (1991), they are especially strong in contemporary African societies. They demonstrate qualities such as public spiritidness and open handedness (especially in leaders) and are a way of building prestige and social station. One's placing within such groupings can form an important component of an individual's social identity. In *No Longer at Ease*, Chinua Achebe colourfully depicts the life of the Umuofia Progressive Union, a home town association (or migrant association) of an Ibo village in Eastern Nigeria. "Umofians who leave their home town to find work in towns all over Nigeria regard themselves as sojourners... No matter where they are in Nigeria, they start a local branch of the Umuofia Progressive Union."

The academic literature on migrant communities supports Achebe's more fictional accounts. Berry (1985), for instance, noted the importance of Yoruba migrants in maintaining a tradition of descent from a common place and organising social actions and interpersonal relations in terms of that tradition. This was achieved through a variety of formal and informal activities, rituals, and obligations which formed a reproduction of social norms and reaffirmed and strengthened ties to home towns. Similarly, writing more recently Francis et al (1996) note that immigrant associations within Nigeria are organised around the community of origin. These groups serve to maintain links between migrants and their home communities. They organise social and welfare functions and also channel significant resources back to home communities. The more successful individuals—teachers, business people, government officials, and other professionals—whether at home or abroad are expected to use their wealth, education and influence to assist native communities as well as brethren and sistren from there.

In the context of modern Africa, these groupings also often form the basis of strategies for negotiating access to state resources as well as the source of legitimacy for many a "big man" with grand national political ambitions.

These community based organisations—tying together people from a specific area of origin or with another unifying link—are a common feature of most African societies and represent the most significant institution of civil society (McNulty and Lawrence 1996). A number of different reasons have been put forward for their formation. Writing on Nigerian organisations, Barkan et al (1991) identify five different sets of reasons:

- an expression of civic virtue;
- the establishment and operation of a shadow state;
- a local bulwark against the state;
- as local growth machines; and
- as a manifestation of sentiment or attachment to a place.

Laitin (1987) suggests that people form and value these communities based on migrant associations because they may be useful in the event of an economic disaster or political crisis. What happens to the bonds of identity, kinship, and interest when the sojourn is over a long (in both the metaphorical and geographical senses) distance? Kasarda and Janowitz (1974) assumed that sentimental attachment to a place diminishes after a period of marked demographic expansion and social change (such as urbanisation). More recently, however, Goody (1990) has shown that factors such as length of residence, income and age are far more important in determining the strength or weakness of sentimental attachment. Castells (1983) suggests that attachment to a place is able to withstand demographic expansion and in some cases is even strengthened in response to it. One need only think of the Irish Americans who often seem more "Irish" than the Irish themselves and who as tourists proceed to irritate the resident Irish with their attachment to "traditions" such as kissing the Blarney stone or searching out what they consider to be the quintessential Irish characteristics.

Nonetheless, rites of passage can be particularly relevant in some African cultures and even being a "long way from home" is no excuse for not marking the arrival of the newborn or other event in the proper manner. Death, in this context, can present particular logistical and cost problems for those whose customs call for them to be laid to rest in their home town or village following an appropriate ceremony. At very least, fear of an undignified burial and the trouble unrested spirits may cause future generations, is enough to generate support for migrant associations tasked with dealing with these important issues.

Table 4 below suggests some of the motivations for forming or joining community organisations for Africans on their sojourn to Britain.

| Motive      | Comments               |
|-------------|------------------------|
| Sentimental | • "long way from home" |

|             |   |
|-------------|---|
|             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• alien environment encourages strong kinship and identity bonding</li> </ul>  |
| Utilitarian | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cultural "insurance": bury others so I may be buried one day</li> <li>• information and support network for economic disasters and political crises back home</li> <li>• shadow "welfare state": immigration advice, housing, information on jobs, etc.</li> <li>• transfer customs and culture to younger generations</li> <li>• source of individual status and kudos for leaders and launchpad for political careers back home</li> </ul> |

Table 4: Africans organising on the sojourn.

Broadly speaking, our survey found some support for the characteristics of community organisations as developed in the literature on such organisations as they operate in West Africa. For instance, most associations surveyed are formed by people from the same village, town or region or with a common ethnic background. And Mundeï, for example, an organisation of Sierra Leoneans from the Mende ethnic group in the southern part of the country was formed following the tragic death of a young Mende man in Britain who was not laid to rest in the appropriate manner. The tragedy brought home the recognition of the need for mutual support during difficult times and acted as a catalyst for the organisation's formation.

On the whole, being identity-based, the informal organisations surveyed tend to be less ideological than their African-led developmental NGO counterparts. Informal organisations broadly saw themselves as providing benefits for their respective communities as a whole rather than specifically for the poorest or most vulnerable members. From this we may surmise that such organisations are less likely to investigate the causes of poverty and exclusion in their communities, much less advocate action to address those fundamentals. Given the bad name that "tribalism" has in Africa: in terms of corruption, the political machinations of elites, and civil strife, it is perhaps understandable that many western developmentalists have shunned identity-based movements as faintly anachronistic if not downright reactionary.

A reappraisal of this position may be overdue for a number of reasons. First, this basis of organisation is proving extremely resilient; long after ideological movements have fractured and fragmented, identity movements retain their relevance for people. Second, nationalism itself—in the context of globalisation and regionalisation—is looking faintly anachronistic, if not a little ineffective, these days. And third, ideological positions are in a state of flux: world politics are no longer organised along capitalist-non-capitalist lines, and even at the national level the boundaries of left-wing and right-wing politics are being redrawn. The full implications of these developments have yet to be assessed in terms of how, in the new era, poverty is to be alleviated and inequalities are to be reduced. Those who care about these issues may find that the current migrant associations and other community groupings form a potentially fruitful starting point.

It should also be acknowledged, however, that associations on the basis of ethnicity can play a less than helpful role in social and political developments back home whilst they are abroad. Evidence of this role abounds. It was recently reported that Tegloma, a Washington DC-based grouping of Sierra Leoneans from that troubled country's southern region had raised \$11,000, \$10,000 of which they donated to an ethnic militia seeking to oust the military junta that took over the country in May, and \$1,000 for refugees stranded in neighbouring Guinea. Likewise, it was said that at the height of tensions in Somalia, some members of the Somali community living in London aligned and organised themselves to mirror the war-lord factions actually fighting in the country. Recognising the often central role that expatriate groups play in fuelling and prolonging conflict in their countries of origin behoves those seeking to end and even prevent conflict to address this issue as a matter of urgency. Persuading Tegloma, for instance, not just of the futility of its gesture, not to mention the perversity of its priorities, but also of the need for dialogue in search of a peaceful resolution to the country's political problems, would go a long way to promoting peace, security and long-term sustainable development in Africa.

### **AFFORD's action agenda**

AFFORD could usefully explore ways of better understanding how mainstream development institutions and organisations perceive informal African organisations. AFFORD could make the argument to these bodies that endeavouring to understand these peoples and their organisations from within their own frames of reference would be a helpful start in opening a dialogue with them and, if appropriate, effecting positive change. Whilst it is acknowledged that these organisations do not form a basis that makes it easy to challenge existing (sometimes inherently unjust) social relations, these organisations do not look as if they are going away anytime soon, so ignoring them is not the answer.

### **Membership**

By very definition, membership of informal organisations is open to those whose identities fit the criteria on which the organisation itself is based. This rather obvious point serves to emphasise the point made above about the relatively non-ideological (at least in class terms) nature of these movements. The strong ethnic or kinship identity of the Ugandan organisation Bika by-Abaganda (Clans of the Buganda), for instance, means that membership crosses the usual divide to include high-income professionals to low-paid service workers and students. Insofar as every Baganda must be a member of one of the 52 clans, the organisation acts as a leveller. In contrast, an organisation with weaker identity ties such as the Old Budonians Association, a grouping of ex-pupils and supporters of the prestigious Ugandan secondary school, Budo, tends to attract middle class professionals to the (unintended) exclusion of other classes.

On the other hand, the tendency to reproduce social relations intact within these organisations means that women tend to be somewhat marginalised from some (though by no means all) informal organisations. Thus the informal organisations are largely driven by men's agenda with women relegated to rather fixed, supporting roles. African men, on the whole, do not share the burdens of home and childcare with their womenfolk and so leave little space for women to participate more fully in informal organisations. In many cases, the response has been not the reform of these

organisations to better reflect women's interests but rather the formation of separate women's wings.

### **AFFORD's action agenda**

The marginalisation of women within informal organisations as a whole does represent a serious limitation on their part. The linkages that have now been established between women's role in a society and development within that society are too strong to ignore. AFFORD will need to consider carefully how to broach this subject with informal organisations and how to work with change agents within the sector (women's groups, for instance) who have already started to address the issue.

### **Management and Leadership**

Although the African informal organisations surveyed tend to have elected management structures and even elaborate sub-committees to deal with specific areas such as immigration, housing or employment, etc., a number of them reported experiencing difficulties with the effectiveness of these structures. A number of interviewees spoke in general terms about the problems affecting the sector as a whole rather than limiting themselves to problems afflicting their particular organisation. Some suggested that these structural problems are linked to leadership inadequacies. A number of organisations pointed to problems of personalised leadership often causing conflict and creating the impetus for the formation of break-away groups. One interviewee explained the proliferation of organisations amongst the Yoruba in terms of egotism: upon losing elections in one organisation, ambitious and status-conscious members would leave that organisation in a fit of pique to form and "lead" a new one. Here again, our findings supported conclusions from studies conducted in Africa: Berry (1985) found that Yoruba community organisations were no more immune from factionalism than any other institution. However, we hesitate to claim that these sort of problems are endemic to the whole informal sector. The Old Budonians Association and Bika by-Abaganda, for instance, are characterised by high quality management and commitment by the leadership to achieving the respective organisations' goals.

Some members of informal organisations identified a need for training to help prepare them for their roles within the management structure. However, it is important to recognise that effecting change in this context will arguably be a more difficult task than in African-led NGOs that do not necessarily encompass the same network of complex social relations. At very least, members may find themselves confronting and challenging the authority of the most articulate and influential members of the community who are often expected (and expect) to hold the most important positions within organisations.

This can lead to problems with organisations and/or some positions within the hierarchy becoming excessively personalised. In such circumstances it can be difficult to hold such people accountable for their actions and to evolve transparent structures within organisations. The knock-on effect is that ordinary members, perhaps unhappy with the way things are going, but feeling unable to question or challenge things, become disillusioned and withdraw their participation and commitment to the organisation. However, insofar as these organisations remain functional and retain some legitimacy,

such a withdrawal of potentially vocal members can play into the hands of dominant personalities with less than wholesome objectives.

Survey participants also complained of severe capacity shortages within informal organisations. Dependence entirely (for most organisations) on volunteers creates difficulties with coordination and maintaining a consistent level of commitment when volunteers must juggle other commitments and responsibilities with the organisation's own requirements.

These sort of problems afflict many organisations—by very definition—in the voluntary sector. In addition, the problems of strong (and sometimes opportunistic) personalities dominating such organisations and the difficult questions around integrity that arise are not unique to informal African organisations. Neither, of course, are they representative of the whole sector so it is vitally important to keep things in perspective. We should also note that, particularly in their early days, organisations may benefit from the energy and drive of a dynamic, visionary personality who gets on with the job at hand even (and especially) when others are too busy or cannot quite see what the point is.

Nonetheless, what is particularly important about the problems raised above is that members of the very informal organisations themselves consider them to be acute, as these issues dominated discussions during our focus group meeting with informal organisations.

### **AFFORD's action agenda**

The above discussion has touched on themes such as accountability, transparency, participation, commitment, and integrity, all of which are difficult enough concepts to define with precision, let alone to implement effectively within organisations. The head of a mining multinational corporation in Africa, when challenged on his company's dubious record of nefarious deals with one particular government, shrugged his shoulders and said: "A people get the leader they deserve." Offensive as this remark was, it did seem to contain a kernel of truth and the question for AFFORD is how it can help address the frustrations expressed by members of informal organisations. Members have responsibilities to participate if they are to hold leaders accountable for their actions (membership participation and accountability are two sides of the same coin). In conceptual terms there is a need for organisational capacity building—to ensure that members of management committees and executive officers such as the treasurer are clear about their roles, for instance—but in practical terms this calls for a creative intervention by AFFORD. The PRA techniques already used during the research exercise could be particularly valuable in exploring ways of achieving effective organisational structures that operate within the inevitable constraints (such as time limitations, for instance). In addition, participatory tools will enable these organisations themselves to collectively identify ways by which they can make their leaders more accountable and define ways by which these organisations could better overcome the obstacles they face. At the very least, they will help break the monotony of meetings invariably dominated by a vocal minority.

### **Funding**



Most informal organisations fund their activities from a combination of members' fees and fundraising events within the community. Membership fees range from £5 a year to £5 a month. Organisations tend to have a core membership (perhaps 30%-40% of the total) that keeps up its payments, surrounded by a layer of more sporadic supporters who may patronise fundraising events. Two main reasons given for lack of members' financial support were: First, members' inability to afford to commit themselves. And second, suspicions about the probity and trustworthiness of the organisation.

The Old Budonians Association found that Ugandans' suspicions about corruption in voluntary organisations initially retarded its progress. Some Ugandan organisations have in the past either mismanaged their affairs or indulged in outright embezzlement of funds, thus giving rise to people's fears and suspicions. OBA has tried very hard to portray a professional image and to create an atmosphere of trust in order to counter these fears. This partly explains the newsletter's presentation through which OBA has tried to illustrate its accountability and to show that it gives value for money as far as dispensing with monies raised is concerned. OBA executives believe the organisation has now earned a reputation for honesty and openness not just amongst fellow Ugandans but also amongst the white former staff members who had their own organisation to help Budo but who now channel some assistance via OBA.

However, even after winning trust within the community, informal organisations still face the challenge of increasing their income from fundraising activities. Community-based fundraising events have the advantage that they encourage participation of members of the community and they help raise the profile of the organisation and its activities. But they tend to be very time-consuming to organise (and rely on ever-scarce volunteer time), they entail a fair amount of risk for often relatively low returns, they compete with many other leisure and entertainment options for patrons' attention and money, and often rely on only word-of-mouth marketing to inform people about events.

Ultimately, informal organisations run the risk of saturating the market with fundraising events if they have not already reached that point. One organisation in particular that did not wish to be identified (because its plans have yet to be put to the members for ratification) is considering segmenting the market (i.e. members of the community) and targeting higher income groups with events that may appeal to them (discos are definitely passé, but perhaps summer barbecues will do the trick) and earn significant sums for the organisation. In spite of this, the organisation recognises the importance of not excluding those within its membership unable to afford these events.

Organisations use funds to finance running costs such as administration, buildings hire, finance of welfare schemes and support activities such as sending assistance back home. Few organisations had sought or succeeded in obtaining external funding for their activities.

### **AFFORD's action agenda**

The issue of informal organisations' ability to raise funds is inextricably linked to management and leadership issues. Nonetheless, our survey has found evidence of innovative ideas being considered by some organisations that others further down the thinking curve may benefit from. Perhaps AFFORD's most useful contribution in this area

would be to try and create fora where the two types of organisations could meet and exchange experiences and ideas.

### **Development projects in Africa**

We have already suggested that the motivations for forming and supporting informal organisations vary (see Table 4 above). These different motivations are not mutually exclusive and the same organisation may have a primary focus on members' welfare in London whilst being less focused on sending assistance back home. Alternatively, owing perhaps to a crisis back home, an organisation's attention may be taken up more with providing assistance or relief for the home region. This latter case appears to apply for a number of the Sierra Leonean organisations, particularly those from the south that have been worst affected by the six-year-old civil war in the country.

Whilst some organisations were able to channel their assistance through sister or parent branches back home, others experienced difficulties finding appropriate or reliable partners on the ground at home. Some organisations sought to liaise with northern NGOs operating in their home regions. Although it was outside the scope of this study, we can speculate that the difficulties some organisations experienced in this endeavour can be explained by the fact that whilst some are happy to accept donations from informal organisations (as indeed they are from the general public), northern NGOs are not structured to work in partnership with informal organisations. If it remains the case—as Salole (1991) found, that international NGOs operating in Africa often overlook traditional self-help associations when they look to form partnerships, preferring instead to work with formal, democratic organisations—then it may take a while for them to establish relationships with informal organisations operating from London.

Almost all the organisations surveyed expressed some desire to implement development projects in their home regions if and when funds permitted. These organisations have varying capacity to implement such projects.

### **AFFORD's action agenda**

There are perhaps three things that AFFORD could usefully do here. First, it could explore ways of helping to build strong linkages with informal organisations here in London and appropriate organisations in their home regions to facilitate the implementation of development projects back home. Second, AFFORD could open a dialogue with international NGOs to explore what scope exists for them to form partnerships with London-based informal organisations keen to participate in the development process in their home regions where international NGOs happen to have operations. Such partnerships would imply costs for NGOs who would have to allocate organisational time and resources to making them work. However, AFFORD should listen to their reservations if there are any and try and sell the idea to them on the basis of the potential long-term developmental benefits that such partnerships may offer. And it will be important to stress that informal organisations are looking primarily for information, advice, and logistical support rather than financial contributions from NGOs. Third, AFFORD could help spread the word about best practice, in development terms, to informal organisations. Naturally, people will be keen to ensure that the local hospital in their home region has beds and equipment; that the local library has books; and the village has water, and so on. But, as we have already discussed, the key is to ensure

that interventions are appropriate, ideally they should be self-sustaining rather than increasing communities' dependence on external support and funding, and so on. Development theory and practice has come a long way and it should be part of AFFORD's mission to ensure that informal organisations have access to some of the accumulated wisdom in this area.

## **Networking**

Most of the organisations surveyed have what we could call vertical links with other organisations. These links are with sister/parent branches back home, in other parts of Europe and in the United States. In addition, some organisations have relations with local health authorities. The Ugandan organisation, Bika by-Abaganda, for instance, recently hosted a large meeting part-funded by a local borough keen to conduct sexual health workshops with young Ugandans.

Horizontal linkages, in other words linkages between informal organisations from different parts of the same country, or even from different countries and regions existed but were less in evidence. Organisations complained of feeling isolated. More importantly, a number of organisations identified practical issues that others with more experience could help them with. One such issue that came up several times was that of charity registration. On the one hand, organisations needed advice in weighing up the pros and cons of seeking charitable status. On the other hand, some organisations needed help with the actual application process, and many of them found it extremely time-consuming.

As already noted, many organisations would benefit from exposure to some of the innovative approaches being advanced by some to problems that most informal organisations face. Organisations surveyed identified other uses of a network of informal organisations:

- advice on setting up effective organisations
- information about fundraising opportunities and donors
- workshops to educate members about their roles and responsibilities
- a forum for general exchanges, information sharing and partnerships.

## **AFFORD's action agenda**

The comments made about a network of formal developmental African NGOs apply here. In addition, AFFORD will need to consider whether a network of informal organisations should be separate to the one for African NGOs.

## **Conclusion**

The above represents a snapshot of the way things are. The bulk of African organisations are informal ones, these are not development organisations as such, rather part and parcel of the everyday hustle and bustle of daily African life; an integral

part of people's culture. They are central and meaningful for large numbers of Africans living in Britain today, a vital link with home and with a culture and way of life left behind. These informal organisations are central to Africans' coping and adaptation strategies when living in the west.

Nonetheless, we have not sought to present a sanitised view of these organisations or their capacity. Many of the problems identified by researchers studying such organisations in West Africa, such as elite dominance, the reproduction of sometimes unequal social relations, and the marginalisation of women can be found in some of the London-based organisations we surveyed. But it is important to note that members themselves have pointed to some of their weaknesses and are keen to address them. And amongst these organisations can be found dynamic and visionary organisers who have much to pass on to their counterparts in terms of innovative strategies for dealing with some members of the public's lack of trust in organisations, funding constraints, and so on. AFFORD can help in this process and the very important task of helping to build and strengthen the bridges between these organisations and similar grassroots organisations in Africa.

Many of these organisations would increase their development activities actually in Africa if they could overcome funding, logistical and other constraints. Although mainstream NGOs have so far failed to capitalise on the opportunity, the centrality of informal organisations to the lives of many Africans living in the west (as well as those living on the continent) suggests that NGOs keen to involve Africans more directly in the process and practice of their own development work should see informal African organisations as potential strategic partners in moving their work forwards. Mainstream NGOs may or may not like the way these informal organisations operate, but they are remarkably resilient and the question for NGOs is whether they will work with the messy world as it is or encourage the creation of structures that they are happier with but which are artificial and ultimately unsustainable. Clearly, mainstream NGOs and other international development organisations will have viewpoints on these important issues and AFFORD could play a key role in soliciting these views and facilitating a dialogue between them and informal African organisations.

## **SECTION THREE: FINDINGS**

### **African organisations and African youth**

#### **The question of identity**

We included a focus on African youth within this study because we believe that concerns about the fate of young people of African descent living in Britain are central to their parents. And given AFFORD's focus on the development of African peoples, exclusion of young African peoples would be absurd. But the issue of identity is an extremely complex one and not one we can explore in depth here. Nonetheless, it is important to clarify what we mean by African youth in the context of recent debates about cultural identity. As Professor Stuart Hall (1990: 222) notes, and it is worth quoting this authority at length, "identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact... we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process...".

Hall explains that there are at least two different ways of thinking about cultural identity.

- "The first position defines 'cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. This 'oneness', underlying all the other, more superficial differences, is the truth, the essence... of the black experience" (ibid.: 223).

According to Hall, the above conception of cultural identity played a critical role in all the post-colonial struggles. Notably, it lay at the heart of the Pan-African political project. It remains important to activists and artists today.

However, Hall argues that there is a "second, related but different view of cultural identity".

- "This second position recognises that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant *difference* which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather—since history has intervened—'what we have become'. We cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about 'one experience, one identity', without acknowledging its other side—the ruptures and discontinuities which constitute, precisely... 'uniqueness'. Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power" (ibid.: 225).

Professor Hall was, in fact, here referring to the issue of representation and Caribbean identities, but we argue that his remarks are as relevant for young people of African descent living in Britain. Furthermore, we suggest that this first view of cultural identity—the essentialist view—which suggests that identities are determined largely by one's point of origin and any deviation from the core, the essence, is to be frowned upon, is one that many African parents bringing up their offspring away from home will implicitly subscribe to. In other words, it is the *root* and not the *route* that is important. We would speculate that these offspring implicitly subscribe to the second view of identity which emphasises a range of influences—in particular, the *route* to the west as well as the *root*—on their identity. Indeed, empirical support for this assertion is implied by research by the Policy Studies Institute (1997) that suggests that:

- "The first and second generations [of ethnic minorities] conceive of and give expression to their identities in different ways. Those who migrated to Britain keep up many of the cultural practices of their country of origin, such as a strong religious commitment, use of the mother tongue and distinctive clothing. Their British-born children and grandchildren may have adapted their lifestyles, but

they are still keen to be associated with their minority heritage. Both groups, though, also wish to be seen as British, without losing their distinctive identity."

AFFORD takes the view that either view, taken to extreme, has dangers. An extremist essentialist view runs the risk of taking us into talk of racial purity, ethnic cleansing, and so on. A radically anti-essentialist view suggests that "anything goes"; identity is an off-the-shelf artefact you simply pick'n'mix. We argue for a pragmatic view that recognises the validity and reality of both positions (in their more moderate forms); the key task is to find a bridge between young and old and to provide a frame of reference for young people that places their relationship with Africa in some sort of positive, meaningful and useful relationship with their everyday existence. We are not neutral in the debate: the more young people of African descent who identify themselves positively with Africa, other Africans and the struggle for development the better. But it is a matter of building consent through persuasion and awareness raising. There can be no justification (or justice) in ramming their "Africanness" down young people's throat, or even defining it for them. Rather we see value in placing before them a choice that we hope they find attractive, a choice that invites them to recognise that very important part of their heritage and a means of developing their full potential to the mutual benefit of themselves and of Africa.

### **The "problem"**

The problem appears multifaceted. Seen from many African parents' viewpoint, they are often alarmed at what they see as the poor educational standards in schools, the lack of discipline tolerated in society, and the diverse range of cultural influences impinging on young people. Seen from the perspective of many young people, the main issue may be survival and credibility on the streets (to have people "respect" you rather than "dis" you). Such young people may describe themselves differently depending on the context and circumstances. At a family wedding, for instance, they may have no trouble with identifying themselves as Nigerian or Ghanaian. On the street, it may be more prudent to use the term "black"; to strategically deploy a gait and some slang (for boys in particular), if this makes life easier. Part of the problem is that young Africans growing up in Britain live in an environment that essentially denigrates virtually anything to do with Africa: In the media everyday, in the racism on the streets, in the schools, everywhere. Little wonder, then, that young people often feel ashamed, or at best indifferent, about being African. Of course, age and stage of personal development may also be factors at play here. Thus impressionable teenagers may be more susceptible to peer pressure and more inclined to conform to a stereotyped image of what is cool and acceptable. Having outgrown that phase and with greater awareness about the world and its complex history, people in their early twenties may actually be interested in making a stronger connection with Africa.

The "problem" manifests itself in a number of ways. Bika by-Abaganda talks of a "culture clash" (see box). There may be mutual miscomprehension or a breakdown in communication. More alarming have been the more serious manifestations of problems. Anecdotally, family problems brought before the Children's Court by local authorities on behalf of children, alleging various forms of abuse are mounting. It is difficult to quantify this problem because the authorities do not publish records that show how many African families are affected.



## **Bika by-Abaganda's dialogue with young Ugandans**

Reflecting the widespread concerns about the gap that seems to be widening between older UK-resident Ugandans and their off-spring, Bika by-Abaganda (The Clans of Buganda), set about addressing them by hosting a "youth discussion about culture clash" on Sunday 25 May 1997. The aim was to facilitate a parent-free discussion at which a number of pre-set questions would be discussed in English by young Ugandans living in the UK. The discussion was part of a wider social and cultural event during which older folk were also engaged in their own series of discussions held in Luganda (the language of the Buganda people). The "serious" part of the day's proceedings culminated in a plenary session in which young people's deliberations could be fed back to parents in a way which meant that no one comment would be attributable to any particular person (the obvious implication being that free and open communication between young and old is not always easy). The plenary was followed by food, live performances by Ugandan youth groups, a disco for the youths (strictly no parents present), and a Kiganda drama performance for the parents. The young men and women held their discussions in separate sessions. The reason for that was probably because each discussion was followed by a talk and mini-workshop on sexual health facilitated by the Croydon health authority which explicitly addressed male and female issues separately. One of AFFORD's research volunteers (African male) sat in and participated in the young men's discussion.

### The pitch

In its leaflet addressed to young people inviting them to take part in the discussion, Bika by-Abaganda put the issue thus: "Do you feel that your parent's generation are forcing their Kiganda cultural values down your throat? Are they unrealistic and old fashioned? Do they ever listen to your views? Can they see things your way? What do other youths think? Here is an opportunity to make your views heard by a cross-section of adults without aggravating your parents!" A number of discussion topics were suggested:

- If you are interested in Kiganda culture and way of life, how would you like your parents to pass it down to you? Which aspects do you like and which ones don't you like? Where are the parents going wrong on this?
- "I would not have minded speaking Luganda but if I speak with a Kiganda accent my friends at school will laugh at me". Do you agree with this statement?
- What are the arguments for and against learning Luganda?
- "Uganda is a rather miserable country! I would not like to go there!" Would you agree with such a statement and why or why not?
- The way things are going, [with respect to] job prospects and quality of life, especially with ever-improving technology, a united Europe and discrimination of all sorts, etc., the grass will be greener in Uganda in the future. What would you do to take advantage of this situation?

- "A Kanzu or Basuuti, as occasional dress, can be elegant and make you look respectable, just like Asian, Arab, Scottish or Jewish youths sometimes do?" What do you think?
- Do we need to learn about HIV/AIDS or is it the older generation's problem?
- Any other topic of your choice

#### The responses

The young people in the male group, of which there were about eight, ranged in age from mid-teens to 22. The facilitator himself was one of the more recent arrivals to these shores, most other participants had either been born in the UK or had arrived here at a very young age. In fact, apart from the facilitator the others spoke with British accents. Discussions did not strictly follow the topics suggested by the organisers. Some points that emerged:

- Participants noted the general atmosphere of negative information about Africa.
- Participants exhibited varying levels of familiarity with Kiganda culture, although a general sense of distance from the culture came across. The most familiar aspect of Kiganda culture seemed to be the food. A few participants seemed totally unfamiliar with Kiganda dress customs (the Kanzu and Basuuti). One person observed that he had on occasions seen his father wear the Kanzu but had thought it was an Arabic outfit. What came across from the discussion was that, far from ramming Kiganda culture down their throats, the parents of these young men, in general, had failed to communicate key aspects of their culture to them, or to bring it alive in any meaningful or engaging way. The result amongst this particular group was a general lack of curiosity about the culture. No one expressed strong views one way or the other about traditional costumes, for instance. However, this did not seem to be causing any anxiety amongst the discussants or any tensions between them and their parents.
- One participant explained that the absence of a cultural context stemmed from the fact that when the family had moved to Britain they had taken up residence in a part of London far from friends from the same country. The one Ugandan family that they knew well lived so far away that keeping up regular visits was so difficult that eventually they had drifted apart. Wide geographical dispersal resulted in isolation for that family and perhaps others who presumably found themselves either assimilating into the host culture or keeping pretty much to themselves. Bika by-Abaganda, and other cultural organisations thus play a vital role in helping to break that sense of isolation.
- Some of the older participants noted that during the 1980s, under a strong US influence, many young people had been embarrassed to confess being African. However, things had changed in the 1990s and fashion in hair, and music (hip-hop) reflected the fact that Africa was back in vogue making identification with the continent less problematic (and something of an asset in fact).
- Participants were fairly neutral about learning Luganda. However, they mostly expressed doubts about whether they would have time to attend, say, a class on Saturday or Sunday. The clear implication is that for people in their teens and post-

teens, other commitments are likely to take priority. Parents may be able to exert more control over the time of their pre-teens off-spring.

- No one expressed a strong desire or expectation that they would end up living in Uganda. Some had only visited once in their life and it almost sounded like a family holiday anywhere rather than a visit "home" with a special emotive pull. Quite a few had vivid memories of the sort of transition they had to make, especially for those who visited relatives in the rural areas. Most were very conscious of not completely fitting in in Uganda. However, they were not necessarily saying that Britain was home either. A number of participants expected that they may end up living somewhere else other than either Uganda or Britain. In other words, they do not really have a "home" in the sense of having a fixed place to which they could always return. Several were able to articulate a sophisticated awareness of the complexity of their identity, having been born in Uganda but brought up in London.

- HIV/AIDS was discussed in the context of its strongly negative association with Uganda and one person suggested that it was in fact yet another reason not to live in Uganda.

- A particularly significant insight was revealed to AFFORD's researcher when having conversation with some of the participants during the meal. Not only had they enjoyed the session, they saw it as a welcome opportunity to interact with other Ugandans in similar positions to theirs. Furthermore, they expressed the desire to do it again and to involve young people from other African countries.

### **Evidence of the problem: Young Africans and the education system**

To what extent, then, are African parents' concerns about their children's education supported by evidence of their achievement? One of the main difficulties in answering this question is the varying terminology used to describe African pupils. According to an Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) study, "the issue of 'black under-achievement' has been complicated by the problems of categorising different ethnic groups within the broadly defined 'black' group. Recent practice has moved away from subsuming *all* ethnic minority groups under the heading 'black'.... Additionally, the use of the term 'black' may obscure significant differences in experience and achievement between pupils with family origins in the Caribbean and those of African ethnic background" (Gillborn and Gipps 1996: 26-27). The 1991 census invited respondents to use categories such as Black African, Black Caribbean and Black Other but research into educational achievement in the past used a range of categories, in addition to black, such as West Indian, Afro-Caribbean, and Black British. We can see how complicated the picture is when we note that the study elsewhere notes that there is a direct relationship between social class and academic achievement: the higher the social class, the higher the achievement (ibid.: 16). Moreover, neither gender nor ethnicity matter much in this respect: whatever the pupils' gender or ethnic origin, those from higher social classes do better on average (ibid.: 17). The 1991 census indicates that compared with Black Africans, Black Caribbean people tended to be less well qualified and to work more often in manual occupations. In other words, the census suggests that Black Africans tended to have occupations that would have placed them in higher social classes than their Caribbean counterparts. This is at least one reason why early data on achievement that combines the two groups may result in understatement of African pupils' achievements. However, things are further complicated by the fact that for some

of London's inner city schools, pupils of West African origin are the fastest growing group, but the class background of these more recent African immigrants may differ significantly from earlier groups: more people are coming to Britain not in pursuit of further education but to escape the increasingly severe economic and political conditions back home (see, for instance, Atampugre undated).

Where the distinction has been made, African pupils' achievement levels do not seem to bear out parents' worst concerns. For instance, the Ofsted report reproduces results from the London borough of Lambeth which has the largest number of Black African pupils aged 5-15. In the latest results, African pupils achieved an average exam score almost identical to white pupils (ibid.: 28). Of course, African parents' expectations may exceed even these levels of achievement, but if that is true, it arguably reflects more widespread concern about a general crisis in British education.

On the other hand, when it comes to things such as exclusions (permanent and temporary suspensions) from school, there is plenty of cause for concern. Exclusion from school can have a detrimental effect on a young person's educational prospects: two out of three pupils who are permanently excluded never return to another mainstream school. The figures for secondary schools may be even worse: of those permanently excluded in 1993-94, four out of five failed to return to a mainstream school (ibid.: 50). According to the Ofsted report: "Black young people are proportionately more likely to be excluded than members of other ethnic groups... Black over-representation in exclusion is a widespread problem, affecting both primary and secondary schools... Black pupils (classified separately as Black African, Black Caribbean and Black Other) are the most frequently excluded... The figure for Black Caribbean young people is the worst; almost six times the rate of exclusion for whites" (ibid.: 52). (The data refers to a sample of between 25% and 30% of all secondary schools in England.) Nearly three times as many Black African pupils are excluded as are white pupils.

No clear reasons are offered for this state of affairs. However, the Ofsted report goes on to suggest that "qualitative research frequently points to a relatively high level of tension, even conflict, between white teachers and African Caribbean pupils" (ibid.: 54). Furthermore, "teachers (in their daily interactions with pupils) and schools (through the adoption of various selection and setting procedures) may play an active, though unintended, role in the creation of conflict with African Caribbean pupils, thereby reducing black young people's opportunity to achieve" (ibid.: 56).

The point to all this is not to damn the schools African pupils attend (many schools in fact do exceptionally well at bringing out the best in pupils of African and Caribbean origin, as well as those from elsewhere). Rather, it is to emphasise the difficult conditions and circumstances that surround and create context for the job that African parents themselves have of bringing up their young people.

### **Responses one: Youth centres**

We have not sought to investigate what young African people's experience has been with the criminal justice system in London although there is every reason to believe that that experience would be tinged by the same factors that affect their school experiences. A whole network of borough- and central government-funded youth clubs and centres seek to mitigate the worst effects of institutional racism, poverty, social exclusion and

disadvantage by providing young people with advice on matters such as careers, drugs, sexual health, legal rights, housing, and so on. Many of these centres also provide a space for young people to hang out. In general, these multiracial facilities are provided on an open access basis for all who choose to drop in although the precise make-up of clients who avail themselves of the service will depend on the characteristics of the population of the local catchment area served. Nonetheless, the key point to note here is that if African youth have *specific needs* they are unlikely to be addressed by these centres that do not make an explicit distinction between people of direct African origin from those of Caribbean descent. Indeed, there appeared to be no consensus as to whether such distinctions would be helpful or divisive. A suggestion forwarded by one youth worker was that the tensions between African parents and their British-born offspring were actually very similar to those between other peoples who had migrated to Britain and their children.

### **Response two: youth provision by informal African organisations**

A large number of the informal African organisations surveyed confirmed that they either made some provision for young people in the range of activities undertaken or had plans to do so. Generally, these services take the form of language classes although one Nigerian organisation was exploring the possibility of running cookery classes. Broadly, then, these classes appear to reflect African parents' concerns about conveying some of the home culture to their children. The question is, on whose terms? Recalling the PSI study referred to above, young people are keen to be associated with their minority heritage. But Bika by-Abaganda appears to be unique in seeking to open a dialogue with young people to establish the terms of any cultural exchange. Incidentally, Bika by-Abaganda also has a rich menu of activities for young Ugandans, including an annual sports event to which children of other cultures are invited as well as African sports celebrities such as John Fashanu to hand out prizes.

The discussion between young Ugandans facilitated by Bika by-Abaganda prompts a number of issues that are probably of relevance to many other African organisations:

- Countering Africa's negative image in the media and in general public discourse is an important task: In what ways can we all help to present a more *balanced* view of contemporary Africa that steers well clear of the romantic construction of Africa as a place of perfect harmony before the arrival of the white man, and a place where we can all trace our origins to kings and queens (no one descended from the serfs); and the dark apocalyptic doom-and-gloom depiction of a continent in terminal and inexorable decline?
- How can parents bring to life their culture in a rich, engaging manner that will fuel young people's curiosity and interest and encourage them to explore it for themselves?
- Parents need to be aware that young people's interest in Africa will wax and wane somewhat in line with what is fashionable on the streets and what else is occupying their attention.
- Time is precious. Young people may not willingly give up their time to attend language classes, say, on a Saturday or Sunday.

- Some of the young people themselves expressed a desire to have a forum to discuss issues of pertinence to them and such a forum could operate as a channel of collective communication between parents and young people.

### **AFFORD's action agenda**

As with other aspects of this research exercise, there exists within the community of African organisations, examples of good practice that other organisations could emulate were they aware of the option. Indeed, Fred Semugera who runs Bika by-Abaganda, the organisation, that has pioneered some innovative approaches to youth provision, has expressed interest in sharing ideas with others. A key flaw in this research effort has been the absence of input from young Africans. AFFORD cannot hope to bridge the gap between first and subsequent generation Africans without engaging both sides in a constructive dialogue. Having established in some measure the extent of the problem between young and old, AFFORD should now explore ways of continuing and extending the process of dialogue started by Bika by-Abaganda to involve a wider range of organisations and young people. Out of this process should evolve a clearer sense of what appropriate interventions either AFFORD or other agencies could make.

### **Conclusion**

We have seen that first generation Africans maintain links with home in part by their everyday cultural practices of religious observance, choice of food and clothing and use of indigenous languages. Young Africans born and brought up in Britain have the complex task of balancing their parents' cultural values and expression with their own more westernised experiences and influences. Their task is not helped by the fact that they must live and operate in a fundamentally racist society. And one, furthermore, that tends to veer between denigrating and making excessively exotic Africa and everything African. Young Africans in Britain do want to associate with their African heritage, the question is on whose terms. This association needs to emerge as the result of a process of dialogue and negotiation between young and old. Culture is not something that older people can simply inject into young people in the hope that it will be transferred in its purest form. Young people's voices need to be heard in this and the attempts by one informal African organisation to engage them represents a model for others to emulate.

### **SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSION**

The overall message of this research exercise has to be one of quiet optimism. In spite of the general disillusion that accompanies much discussion about Africa, we can draw courage from the fact that Africans abroad are taking the initiative to organise in their own interests. A particularly important observation is that within both organisational sectors considered—formal and informal—there exist self-critical participants who are prepared to examine their practice, learn from others and explore ways of doing things better. Energetic and positive individuals and their organisations within both sectors are likely to prove a valuable resource in generating change from within the community of African organisations operating in London that we hope to see emerge. Organisations such as Akina Mama wa Afrika, Bika by-Abaganda, Action for Children, and the Old Budonians Association, to name but a few, embody the innovative ideas, creativity, integrity, dynamism and vision that many other organisations can draw on. From the international NGOs, Concern Universal seems an obvious candidate, given its already



evident commitment to open up channels of communication and cooperation with UK-based African NGOs.

Four key themes have emerged from this research. First, African organisations want to break their sense of isolation, learn from and share with others, and build a platform to develop and advance ideas and issues of common interest. An effective network of African organisations would be a commendable outcome of this research exercise and would do justice to the immense amount of time and effort that many individuals and African organisations have devoted to making it a relative success. Nonetheless, establishing a network is one thing, keeping it alive, dynamic, relevant and useful to its members is quite another. Indeed, if it is to act as prime facilitator, AFFORD itself will need to ensure that it stands firm as an organisation and has sufficient capacity to undertake such an onerous task. To that end, a comprehensive review and evaluation of its execution of this its first major project would enable AFFORD to learn from its errors and omissions and the things that went well; develop its own capacity; and entrench a culture of continual learning and improvement.

Second, both formal and informal African organisations have identified training as a key need to ensure their own continued success and development. This training need covers a range of topics which include fundraising and proposal writing for formal organisations and capacity building for informal organisations. A third issue is the relationship between African organisations and international NGOs working on development issues in Africa. A key challenge for AFFORD is to open a dialogue with these organisations with a view to building a bridge between them and Africans in London. And finally, to the issue of British-based African youth. Again, the theme is bridge-building, this time between young people and first generation Africans. Finding the common ground between these two groups of people will contribute to the peace of mind of the parents, to the self-esteem and personal development of the young people and in the long run, we believe, to the well-being of Africa itself. It is, therefore, an important part of AFFORD's mission.

Two of this report's limitations in particular should be noted. The failure to address the issue of women's role within African organisations looks all the more glaring now, especially in light of the attention given to youth issues. In setting out its research agenda AFFORD was governed somewhat by the existing concerns that were preoccupying African organisations. This has had the undesirable effect of perpetuating the marginalisation of women generally evident within African organisations and societies. We nevertheless hoped that in defining organisations and associations as our frame of reference, we would equally explore in depth the experiences of African women. Although some women-led organisations responded to the questionnaire the majority were African-led developmental NGOs. We have learned much less about women's experiences in informal organisations. With hindsight we should have investigated the issue further. We do recognise this oversight and we are committed to avoiding such an exclusionary approach in our future work. The second limitation of this report is its failure to address the practicalities for AFFORD of implementing the recommendations made. AFFORD will need to debate the report, prioritise the recommendations, and establish a means of implementing them.

If ordinary Africans living in the diaspora get together, organise, connect with Africans on the continent, there is every chance that people—African people—will place themselves at the centre of debates about African development; and, indeed, change the practice of

that development. If we are even one step closer to that goal, then this work, despite its flaws, will have been worthwhile.

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