NGOs and the depoliticisation of development: The case of GADRA education in Grahamstown

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Abstract

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been criticised for depoliticising development through focusing on alleviating suffering rather than on addressing the root causes of poverty and underdevelopment. This research explores whether and how NGOs can act in ways that do not depoliticise development. The research focuses on education NGOs and in particular on the NGO GADRA education in Grahamstown, South Africa, to provide insights into ways in which politically conscious leadership of NGOs attempt to deal with the contradictions that are inherent in this field of work. This research provides a brief history of the South African Education system as a means to set a basis for the discussion of the role of education NGOs in the country. Furthermore it looks at the work that is done by GADRA education in the Grahamstown community. The thesis makes the argument that education NGOs can act in ways that do not depoliticise development because by providing access to education for people who are structurally excluded from education, they contribute to shifting power. This research found that although the leadership of GADRA Education acknowledge that they are confronted with great challenges in terms of how to bring about changes in the education system, they are hopeful that advocating for quality education will bring about the potential for the disruption of power relations as they exist between the state organs and the public.

Acknowledgements

Acronyms

NGOs   Non-governmental organisations

GADRA   Grahamstown Area Distress Relief Association

AGM   Annual General Meeting

GMS   GADRA Matric School

NSC   National Senior Certificate

DOE   Department of Education

SGB   School Governing Body

PESD   Primary Education Support and Development

APF   Anti-Privatisation Forum

NPC   National Planning Commission

DBE   Department of Basic Education

RDP   Reconstruction and Development Programme

NNSSF   National Norms and Standards for school funding

SAPs   Structural Adjustment Programmes

ANC   African National Congress

EFA   Education for All

GEAR   Growth, Employment and Redistribution

GROs   Grass-roots Organisations

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction

Shivji (2004: 690) makes the argument that in the current context of neo-liberal hegemony Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) have been conditioned to act and not to think. As a result of this lack of theorisation, NGOs tend to also lack a grand vision for society and have instead been cast in a surrogate role that ultimately functions in aid of the existing capitalist economic order. Through assuming this role, NGOs tend to be complicit with the economic order and thus fail to be the agents of change that they are often professed to be. In connection with Shivji's argument, this study will critically explore the claim that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) depoliticise development and will examine to what extent it is possible for NGOs to intervene in ways that do not engage in a process of depoliticisation of development work. The importance of looking at the issue of depoliticisation is that one of the key criticisms of NGO work is that it tends to depoliticise development. NGOs are accused of paying insufficient attention to the underlying structural causes of poverty and underdevelopment in the communities being assisted and, consequently, of not addressing the power relations that are contributing to and perpetuating the problem.

Research Goals

The study relates debates about NGOs and the depoliticisation of development to the role of education NGOs in South Africa and in the Eastern Cape in particular. The goal of the research is to find out whether or not the approaches used by GADRA education can be said to adequately address concerns about the depoliticising role of NGOs.

Methodology

This research was carried out in the form of in-depth open-ended interviews with staff members of GADRA Education. Furthermore, the research makes use of various reports, documents and articles written by some of the leaders of the organisation as well as of an independent report commissioned by the organisation as a means to keep track of GADRA's activities as specified in the strategic plan. GADRA education was specifically chosen for this study because the leadership of the organisation appear to be people who are conscious of the criticisms that are often levelled against NGOs, and are thus self-critical of the work that they do within this organisation. The interview data will be used as a means to

understand what programmes GADRA education have been doing and, by relating their activities to debates in the literature on NGOs and development, will provide a contribution to discussions about the role of NGOs in South Africa and beyond. Although the interviews are unable to present complete picture of how the programmes that form a part of GADRA's intervention in the community impact this community, their usefulness is that they are able to provide insight as to how the leaders of the organisation grapple with the contradictions of working for an NGO while being aware of some of the criticisms levelled against NGO work.

Organisation of the thesis

The thesis begins with this introductory chapter which introduces the research by setting out the context and goals of the research and the methodology used to answer the research question. Chapter Two conducts a literature survey on NGOs and the depoliticisation of development. Furthermore, the chapter looks at education NGOs in particular. Chapter Three discusses the state of education in South Africa. The chapter briefly examines past and present issues faced by the education system in South Africa. Furthermore the chapter introduces GADRA education and the programmes that are run by GADRA in Grahamstown. Chapter Four relates the discussions overviewed in Chapters Two and Three with the interviews conducted with the leadership of the organisation to discuss in what ways the experiences of GADRA education confirm or challenge the arguments made in literature on NGOs.

Chapter Two

NGOs and the Depoliticisation of Development: A Review of the Literature

Introduction

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are prominent role players in the development world today. However, the role of NGOs remains a very contentious subject with some scholars defending NGOs' relevance as valuable agents of poverty alleviation, whilst others are more critical of their role. This literature review looks at prominent debates in relation to NGOs and the relationships that they have with the different stakeholders, and how this has impacted on the idea of development. Firstly, it looks at literature that has dealt with the challenge of defining what constitutes an NGO. Secondly, it provides a history of NGOs across the globe, in Africa and specifically in South Africa. The review then moves on to look at the positive attributes of NGOs as well as the criticisms that have been levelled against these institutions. The chapter concludes by focusing in on education NGOs in the world and more specifically on education NGOs in South Africa.

Definition

The term "NGO" has been generally used to refer to any non-profit organisation that is predominantly a value-based organisation that is independent from government. The term encompasses a wide range of agencies that differ in size, geographical location and function (Riddell and Robinson, 1995: 26). These organisations tend to be dependent on some form of charitable donations and voluntary service. However, in more recent years they have become increasingly professionalised (Lehmann, 2007; Clarke, 1995). Although various forms of NGOs exist, each with their distinctive focus, NGOs tend to be involved in one way or another with development initiatives that are concerned with service delivery, capacity building or policy influencing. NGOs exist both in underdeveloped and developed countries and are closely related to the idea of aid that is often portrayed as a form of altruism that transfers wealth from the rich within a society to the poor as a means to reduce poverty and empower the poor who are considered as being disempowered as a result of the conditions bred by poverty (Manji and O'Coill, 2002: 568).

In order to understand what an NGO is, it is necessary to explore the concept of development and the way in which this concept's meaning has shifted over time. Development is often defined as the process of economic growth that brings about an improvement in the standard of living of the poor in society (Lancaster, 1999: 14). Development through this lens is understood as the expansion or the maximisation of a society's capabilities. These capabilities are concerned with ideas of individual agency and securing the access and control of resources through the use of market forces (Mohan, 2002). The increased access also refers to access to productive assets of society which include health, education and income earning potential (Lancaster, 1999: 14).

In the immediate post-colonial era, development was considered to be best promoted by providing aid directly from developed states to underdeveloped states through the use of state institutions. It was assumed that this would help the underdeveloped states achieve economic growth that would alleviate poverty in the underdeveloped states that were characterised by high levels of poverty. However, by the end of the 1980s the donors who were responsible for the provision of aid to the underdeveloped states lost faith in states as agencies of development and as a result turned their attention to alternative means of development and NGOs became more fashionable in development discourse (Riddell and Robinson, 1995: 1 & 9). This shift can be directly attributed to the concept of the "New policy agenda" which is underpinned by neoliberal philosophy and largely came about towards the end of the cold war era (Obiyan, 2010; Mohan 2002).

NGOs are often referred to as being a part of the third sector as a means to situate NGOs in their own unique space, separate from the state and the private sector (Shivji, 2002: 27). Manji and O'Coill (2002: 568) explain that NGOs form a part of a vast institutional and disciplinary nexus of official agencies and practitioners and other different forms of experts that engage in constructing knowledge about how we understand the question of poverty in society. The common feature of all development agents is that these are organisations that are concerned with public welfare through the promotion of social, economic or political development within various communities. Another common feature of these organisations is that, depending on their size and influence they are able to operate at local, national or international levels (Madon, 1999; Brown and Moore, 2001, Riddell and Robinson, 1995:15).

In some cases the term NGO has been used interchangeably with Grass Roots Organisations (GROs) and social movements, however this has been considered as being problematic by scholars such as Edwards and Hulme (1996) and Shivji (2004 :690) because they argue that this reduction ignores what they have identified as the clear distinctions between these two forms of organisations. In order to make clear the distinction between the two forms of organisations, Edwards and Hulme (1996) argue that NGOs are mainly intermediary organisations that are engaged in sourcing funding and other forms of support to communities that are engaged with initiatives that work towards the alleviation of poverty in society. However, this attempt to draw the distinction between these organisations has been countered by arguments such as that made by Green and Matthias (1995, 313), which refer to "Grassroots NGOs". This is useful in that it brings to light how over time, as a result of the evolution that has occurred, the distinction is no longer clear. There is a constant transition that occurs whereby GROs and social movements become increasingly professionalised and mirror characteristics that are predominantly attributed to NGOs.

This lack of coherent understanding of what NGOs are has resulted in varied debates over the function and value of these organisations within the development paradigm. Whilst some scholars have identified the positive side to this heterogeneity, others have been critical and flagged the lack of coherence as being part of the fundamental problems that have led to the failure of these institutions in some areas of development (Uphoff, 1993; Ebrahim, 2003).

While it must be acknowledged that the term "NGO" is used in diverse ways, for the purpose of this particular research NGOs are defined as small or medium scale organisations that operate independently of government and are not profit-making organisations, but are engaged in philanthropic work that provides a community with assistance that is aimed at capacity building, service delivery or policy influencing.

The History of NGOs

It is not possible to understand the role and impact of NGOs without understanding their history. While NGOs have a long history that can be traced back to the colonial period (Manji and O'Coill, 2002), it was in the 1980s that they were increasingly recognised as important institutions in the broader development and aid sectors (Brodhead, 1987: 2; Clark, 1998: 36; Doh and Teegan, 2003: 2; Srinivas, 2009:614; Welch, 2001: 1). The "magic bullet phase", as

it has been referred to by Lewis and Kanji (2008), came as a result of NGOs attracting greater recognition and increasingly forming part of mainstream development policy all over the world. At the end of the Cold War around 1989, bilateral and multilateral donors who had previously channelled funds through states, shifted towards a new policy agenda that looked towards providing aid through private organisations. This was related to the shift in ideology around the role of states in the areas of welfare provision. The idea of welfare provision comes from the Keynesian doctrine of economics whereby policies that stimulate economic growth and protect against deep recession form part of the main state macroeconomic framework. These policies are put in place as a means to encourage investment and stabilise demand. The benefit of this approach is that it is able to compensate for the dysfunctions of market failure and the uncertainties and risks of markets (Cohen and Arato, 1990: 11). However, in the late 1980s and 1990s there was a shift in the attitude away from the idea that states are the preferred agents for welfare provision. This shift in attitude was related to increasing global support for privatisation in line with neoliberal policies. Neoliberalism in brief, is understood to be an approach that opposes state intervention in the economy in order to allow individuals to fully participate in free and self-regulating markets (Thorsen and Lie, 2007: 14). The adoption of neoliberal policies led to a decrease in state provision of social services which left a gap in society that has increasingly been occupied by private social agents, such as NGOs.

By the 1990s the NGO sector had grown considerably and NGO-led development was increasingly considered the main alternative to state-led development. As a result of this, NGOs continued to grow in capacity and influence with regards to decisions on global affairs and the impact on people's lives (Drabek, 1987: x; Edwards and Hulme, 2002:3; Lancaster, 1999: 228). The influence of NGOs has grown to a point whereby they have emerged as major actors in the development policy agenda because they are believed to enable choice, be a force that is able to monitor states' progress, and be efficient at the same time. As a result of the understanding that NGOs predominantly occupy the space that connects the public and the private spheres, their influence continues to grow. This has also been enabled by globalisation which changed the expected roles of government and the obligations they have towards their citizens. NGOs have had to provide for the services that governments have been unable or in some cases unwilling to provide, as will be discussed further in the next section (Lehman, 200; Mohan, 2002).

The History of NGOs in Africa

The history of NGOs in Africa can be understood in relation to the continuities and discontinuities of the colonial and post-colonial eras. Although their focus and main activities have shifted considerably over the years, the belief that Africa is a region that is lacking in capabilities has been a consistent theme. The roots of NGOs in Africa are found in the emergence of missionaries on the continent, which partly explains some of the concerns expressed about their work on the continent. This is because the charity dispensed by missionaries was used as a means to stabilise the institutions of colonial rule (Manji and O'Coill, 2002:571; Shivji, 2007). This was done through the language of the civilizing mission via the provision of education, health and other social welfare services. The missionaries and other forms of voluntary organisations were considered to be the key weapons in the ideological warfare that helped sustain colonialism. Voluntary welfare provision was a good vehicle through which the agenda of social control could be pushed because it was apparently apolitical and therefore not subject to much interrogation and thus critique. The programmes provided under these organisations often were geared towards "civilising" the native people. This approach was blind to the injustices that had caused the poverty which charitable initiatives sought to address and understood poverty and deprivation as being a consequence of the failings of Africans themselves as opposed to being a result of the colonial societal structures. Manji and O'Coill (2002: 571) argue that the development discourse that prevailed over all other theoretical approaches directly after colonialism enabled views that are similar to colonial discourse to prosper.

Around this period there were notably two distinct groups of NGOs. Firstly, the charitable organisations that were run by westerners but based outside of the west. The second group consisted of organisations that were formed in the west as a consequence of the World War 2 but later on branched out to have direct involvement in the colonies. These were organisations such as Oxfam and Save our Children, to mention only a few. In the midst of all this transition, the anti-colonialism movements resulted in the challenge of early NGOs which focused on the provision of aid and as a consequence these organisations began making use of the language of "development". These development NGOs were not directly associated with the colonial powers as the earlier organisations had been (Manji and O'Coill, 2002:571-572). Development discourse was used as a means to replace overtly racist

language that had been used before this period. The term "uncivilised" which had been used when referring to the Africans was replaced with the term "underdeveloped". This gave justification for the intervention into the new "independent" states (Manji and O'Coill, 2002:572). These complexities contributed to the contention around the role of NGOs on the continent.

Upon obtaining independence, there were high hopes for how the new governments would bring about change in the lives of Africans. However, this hope was short lived and the discourse around the African state changed to one that characterised many African states as "failed states". This is because the new independent governments were understood to have been unsuccessful in managing their economies (Kabemba, 2005). In the 1980s, the subject of African states' indebtedness came under spotlight and gave international organisations the leverage that they needed to gain control (Manji and O'Coill, 2002:578). From this point international financial institutions adopted the view that Africa's lack of "development" was best addressed through formalisation of standardised economic interventions such as the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) that were subsequently imposed on several African countries. SAPs encouraged a reduced role for the state and, consequently, a space opened up within which NGOs were able to play a bigger role. As a result of this "rolling back" of the state, the influence of NGOs grew tremendously and thus they became an essential part of the development process in Africa. As a result of the deeply embedded roots of poverty in Africa, the states have become increasingly dependent on these organisations for the survival of their citizens (Heinrich, 2001: 10; Shivji, 2007:viii; Manji and O'Coill, 2002:578). As a result of this history of NGOs and their emergence and increasing prominence on the African continent, the space that they occupy is one that is riddled with contradictions, some of which will be discussed later in this chapter.

NGOs in South Africa

As with other countries on the African continent, NGOs in South Africa became increasingly significant in the 1980s, although for slightly different reasons. The history of the anti-apartheid struggle has meant that the relationship that was forged between the NGOs and the other stakeholders in the context of South Africa has been slightly different, when compared to other states on the continent. The anti-apartheid struggle was at its height at the time NGOs rose to prominence on the continent, and many NGOs in South Africa were involved in this

struggle. However, anti-apartheid NGOs were not the only NGOs that existed, other types of NGOs that operated around this period were aligned with the apartheid government, whilst yet others attempted to remain neutral and focused on providing aid and welfare in a way that was removed from the politics of the time (Heinrich, 2001: 2).

In the post-apartheid era, the NGO sector took a different form, but continued to be active. Indeed, they continued to grow exponentially in capacity (Kraak, Faizi and Smith, 1996:77). In the years of transition to democracy the NGOs were faced with many challenges and what could be identified as an identity crisis because of the change in political climate in the country that was based on with the logic of liberation having been achieved (Heinrich, 2001: 3). However, NGOs moved into sectors other than those related to the political struggles. For example, some moved towards influencing the relations between businesses that operate within the state and the governments (Doh and Teegan, 2002). In general South Africa today has a very broad and relatively strong civil society base in which NGOs are a key component. These organisations have come to play different roles within ensuring that democratic processes function more effectively. This is because besides being involved with poverty reduction NGOs also sometimes play the role of political watchdogs (Ranchod, 2007:3; Shivji, 2004:692).

Although South Africa was not forced to implement SAPs in the same way that many former colonial states in Africa were, it did have its own combination of similar policies that have impacted on the role that NGOs have come to play in the gap between the public and private political spheres within society. At the dawn of the democratic state the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) was implemented as a means to address the injustices of the apartheid state. In addressing issues of socio-economic inequality as a key issue in the South African society, the white paper on the RDP proposed the reconstruction and development of various sectors in South Africa. However, the RDP did not specify the mechanisms of implementation. In 1996, the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) policy was put in place. It was a macro-economic strategy which would supposedly allow the goals of the RDP to be realised. Although GEAR did not replace RDP, it did inform the government policy stance on economic development. As a result of the introduction of GEAR, the approach that was taken towards social services was one that used a model of financing that was based on liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation which implied the withdrawal of

the state. The resulting increase in inequality as a result of the withdrawal of the state from the provision of social services opened up a space for greater NGO involvement (Seroto, 2012: 78-81). Upon the implementation of GEAR the government was not willing to negotiate with the civil society stakeholders. This failure to be inclusive of other stakeholders in the decision making process led to a gap in the structure that brought about the emergence of multiple advocacy organisations (Ranchod, 2007:6-8). Examples of the kind of advocacy organisations that emerged in response are the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) and the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). These forms of advocacy organisations organised around a range of different issues such as the provision of electricity, water, adequate health care and education. The following section expands specifically on how education has been affected in South Africa as a result of all the above mentioned shifts and how the NGO sector has been instrumental in dealing with these issues.

Education NGOs

NGOs internationally have provided services in the education sector for a very long time. In many cases this was due to a need to provide services as a result of the inadequate provision by governments. Because NGOs are often concerned with issues of social justice, they have long been contributors in the areas of citizen education (Ribeiro, et al, 2012: 32; Marshall, 2005). Mundy and Murphy (2001, 96-99) provide an extensive history of education NGOs that dates as far back as the 1950s in the states found in the North. In this context, education NGOs became increasingly influential and active in global politics through advocacy campaigns in the 1970s. As a result of these campaigns, the formation of networks of literacy and adult education were formed. This led to the education NGO community gaining recognition from UNESCO. In the late 1980s UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank and UNDP hosted the Education For All (EFA) conference which promoted universal primary education for all. This agenda was supported by the idea that all citizens are entitled to state provided education. However these ideas were soon eroded by a shift in attitude away from welfare state policies towards supporting neoliberal state policies in global politics. As a result of this, it was acknowledged that NGOs would be fundamental to achieving the goals of the EFA conference.

Education NGOs have grown in their influence on international policies on education. They are seen to be very active all over the world with commendable results in terms of their

advocacy campaigns. They continue to play a critical role in improving the access to education all over the world (Rose, 2009:219; USAID, 2003). NGOs are considered to be effective because of their involvement in education in a variety of ways. Education NGOs are responsible for international advocacy campaigns and direct provision of education to children who have somehow been excluded from accessing government schooling (Rose, 2009:220).

Education NGOs have also played an important role in regions found in the global South. The role of NGOs in this regard can be traced as far back as colonial era whereby missionaries used education as a means to further their own Christian religious agenda and legitimate colonialism (Shivji, 2002: 5). In more recent years, with the introduction of new economic policies in the form of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and similar policies discussed above, there was a reduction in the budget for state funded education and as a result there was an increase in the need for education NGOs to provide services to the excluded communities.

In South Africa, education NGOs are considered by many to be an essential component for encouraging economic growth and combating poverty and inequality. This is because of the link that is drawn between education and the increase in economic opportunities. Therefore an important component of development is increased access to education (Amandla Development, 2010). In the case of South Africa, education has also suffered from the continuities of colonialism and the apartheid regime. During the colonial era the education of Africans was not seen as a priority, although missionary schools provided some education to Africans. Later on, the apartheid government did provide education for black students – indeed some commended them for their massification of education in the 1970s and 1980s, but this education was highly differentiated along lines of race and class (Seroto, 2012: 77). Black South Africans received so-called "bantu education", whilst white South Africans received a superior education. This has had lasting implications in the sense that it has meant that education in South Africa has since been a highly politicised sector of society. This is perhaps evident from the history of schools often being places of protest as opposed to merely fostering learning.

While the post-apartheid South African government has consistently allocated a large portion of the annual budget to the education system, this has not resulted in adequate improvements (Amandla Development, 2010:2-4). The recognition of this failure has led to multiple proposals to look towards innovative means to better implementation. One of the notable proposals that has been made relates to the idea of "basic per learner education expenditure" (Seroto, 2012: 81). However, continued inequalities and inadequacies in the provision of education in South Africa has resulted in the emergence of a number of education-related NGOs in South Africa.

NGOs, whether involved in the education sector or other sectors, have been subject to much critique. The following section expands further on the criticisms levelled against NGOs in general as a means to draw the connection between the role of NGOs providing education and the question of the depoliticisation of development.

Criticisms of NGOs

Since the late 1980s when NGOs were first acknowledged as playing a significant role in the development process, they have come under heavy criticisms from various scholars for multiple reasons. Broadly speaking, NGOs have been praised for their bottom up approach (or downward accountability) as a result of the public participation, flexibility and innovativeness (Uphoff, 1993). However, they have also been heavily criticised for being more accountable to their donors than to the people they work with (upward accountability), and for reinforcing the structures of capitalism that some critics argue further the marginalisation of the populations with whom the NGOs work (Lehman, 2007). In this way they are also identified as being agents of capitalism that alleviate people's suffering while doing little to bring about the radical societal changes that are necessary (Lehman, 2007).

Depoliticisation of Development

Critical development theorists such as Escobar (1995) and Ferguson (1994) argue that while ostensibly development initiatives are aimed at improving people's lives, they actually often have very different effects and may obscure problematic power relations. Escobar (1995) argues that many programmes aimed at achieving development goals are ultimately being used as a means of social control as opposed to aiding the reduction of poverty. The idea of

development and how it matured to function as a depoliticising discourse relates to the way in which spaces were created whereby certain things could be said and thought, whilst other things could not. Escobar (1995 85-87) argues that if we understand discourse as being the process through which social reality comes into being or the articulation of knowledge and power, of the visible and expressible, then one begins to observe the systematic function that the concept of development occupies in the neo-liberal world. This point becomes very crucial to the understanding of the criticism of depoliticising of development by NGOs. This is because this point relates to another one made by Ferguson (1994) when he made the argument that in the case of Lesotho, the programmes that were instituted as a means to promote development failed to address the underlying political problems that exist in the country. This is because they understood the failure of development in the country as being caused by a lack of appropriate technical expertise as opposed to interrogating the structural causes of poverty.

Critics argue that NGOs typically make use of a technocratic approach to poverty and development that leaves unchallenged the power relations that exist in the societies where they operate (Shivji, 1998; Wallace, 2003: 216). Poverty is treated as though it is something that is technical and can thus be solved with political technologies that are based on mechanisms and procedures that are devised by NGO workers who are deemed as being experts in the field. In this way NGOs operate as agents of social control rather than really assisting in the reduction of poverty (Escobar 1995). In this process, NGOs thus participate in the depoliticisation of poverty by stabilising and institutionalising power relations and thereby preserving the status quo (Gorden, 2004: 2; Manji, 1998: 25; Nanacy and Yontcheva, 2006: 5-6). Through this process, the poor are inevitably blamed for their poverty. In contrast with technocratic approaches which empower development "experts", critics argue that political struggles are necessary in order to allow for a space where human agency can be asserted and where all members of society can freely participate (Manji, 1998).

Critics acknowledge that not all NGOs operate in the same way and that some may resist playing such a depoliticising role (Lancaster, 1999). However, it is argued that even when the institutions of development such as NGOs have attempted to change their approach and have looked towards more participatory solutions for instituting the processes of development, the

problem has remained that power structures are insufficiently interrogated (Gaynor, 2009: 29).

NGOs and State Sovereignty

Another important and related criticism that has been levelled against NGOs is that they tend to undermine state sovereignty. As previously stated, the increasing prominence of NGOs came about around the 1980s when they were considered as being more efficient than state institutions as beneficiaries of aid. This shift in ideology was also largely supported by the state failures that left donors very disillusioned with state economies and thus seeking alternative means of funding development (Meyer, 1995; Brodhead, 1987: 2; Clark, 1998: 36; Doh and Teegan, 2003: 2; Welch, 2001: 1). The promotion of the "New policy agenda" meant that the donors were keen to finance mostly on the grounds of economic efficiency and contribution to what was characterised as "good governance". This concept was arguably supported more as a result of a particular ideological position than because of empirical evidence in support of the new policy agenda.

The increased dependency on aid leads to the compromise of the state's right to self-determination because the donors of the aid end up having significant influence on the policies that are instituted in the aid recipient states. The conditionalities that come with aid tend to compromise state sovereignty. This is a criticism that is also linked to the scrutiny of North-South state relations. This is based on the idea that the state no longer assumes a central role in the provision of welfare to its citizens. As a result of this it is losing control over important policy decisions. This is because through this avenue NGOs can be made potential vehicles for the advancing of outside influences and ideologies. This is possible through the implementation of neo-liberal policies that employ market forces that when faced with failure; tend to leave the economically weaker states in a position of further aid dependency (Lehman, 2007).

The states that are found in the global South are predominantly characterised as being riddled with poverty and generally underdeveloped. Many of these states are also heavily indebted to international organisations or states found in the North. As a result of these factors, the South was conditioned to accept and implement a combination of policies that were ostensibly

aimed at poverty reduction, such as the SAPs mentioned earlier. The prerogative of this poverty reduction mechanism was the reduction of social and welfare expenditure by governments. This further created a space for the increased prominence of NGOs because SAPs created gaps in welfare provision and NGOs stepped in to fill these gaps (Shivji, 2003; Mohan, 2002; Riddell and Robinson, 1995: 16).

The implementation of SAPs in the South highlights the unequal power relations that exists amongst states in global politics (Drabek, 1987; Burger and Owens, 2010). As a means of confronting this problem, Brodhead (1987) argues that there needs to be a reassessment of the nature of interaction between the North and the South. This is part of a history of continuities and discontinuities of Western imperial rule that has weighed heavily on states found in the South. The relationship formed between the North and South resulted in many states found in the South being highly dependent on aid from the North. The dependence on foreign funding resulted in questions around the legitimacy of the justifications for the conditionalities that came with foreign aid (Edwards and Hulme, 1996; Godfrey, et. al, 2002; Ebrahim, 2003; Fafchamps and Owens, 2005; Roy, 2008).

Jordan (2000), Roberts, et. al (2005), Brown, et. al, (2012) and Meyer (1997) are amongst a number of scholars who have argued that North-South state power relations are actually not as simple as some scholars have portrayed them as being. These scholars argue that NGOs are not responsible for the undermining of state sovereignty of the states found in the global South, but are instead responsible for challenging the distribution of power in the global politics through transnational networks that have established considerably more equal power relations. The transnational networks that are formed by international NGOs challenge the long standing problems of structurally unequal positions through making use of these networks as sites for negotiating action plans that are more compatible for both donors and recipients. This is also a point that is made by Besharati (2013:8) when he argues that there has been a shift in global politics and middle income economies, some of which are found in the South, who used to be receivers of aid have increasingly joined the donor community thus complicating the North-South power relations.

The complexities of how the different NGOs access funding is located within a larger institutional context that is influenced by the inter-institutional behaviour amongst the

different NGOs that are found to be in a position of power in a given period and place. This means that in many cases the funding is not determined solely by economic considerations such as the comparative advantage or disadvantage that a given project has over others, but is rather based on the donors' own interests. They are therefore subject to trends and fashions of the academy or policy making world. These interests can be somewhat historically determined and as a result tend to correlate with changes in the international political and economic environment. As a result of this connection a number of scholars have been very critical of the ways in which the NGOs source their funding. The questions that arise from the critical engagement with the implications of how NGOs source their funding inevitably relate to questions about accountability, legitimacy, autonomy and the real role played by NGOs in the processes of development (Sanyal, 1991; Nelson and Dorsey, 2003; Koch, et. al, 2009; Edwards, 1999).

Critics argue that once again, the economically weaker governments have found themselves in a position whereby they are denied the power and control of their states. For example, Shivji (2002: 21) points out how in the case of the African states, aid from the west has always come with stringent political conditionalities that gives clear guidelines as to how the recipients of aid are to make use of the funds. This is because the funding that is given to the states in need tends to be used as a means of negotiating and co-opting recipient states to buy into ideologies that are not necessarily in their favour in the long run. Similarly, NGOs are given funding that pressures them into accepting approaches and ideologies that they might otherwise not have accepted. The criticisms based on donor funding also raise questions about whose interests end up really being served by the NGOs. Graham Hancock in his book *"The Lords of Poverty"* (1989) problematises the entire idea of aid on the basis that it is fundamentally flawed because it is premised on the self-interest of the donors that often results in misguided policies, bureaucratic inefficiency and corruption.

Accountability and Democratisation

One of the main characteristics of NGOs is that they are dependent on donor funding and this has made them vulnerable to questions of accountability. The idea of accountability in relation to NGOs is one that remains a contested issue because there is no consensus on what should constitute accountability. To whom are NGOs meant to account to and why?

According to Brown and Moore (2001) in general terms, the idea of accountability implies that a party who makes a form of a promise needs to recognise that it has to honour the promise that it has made to its stakeholders. This means that the party thus assumes the moral and legal responsibility that would best ensure that the promise that was made has been fulfilled. The contestation around the issue of accountability is based around the issue of whether the NGOs are more accountable to the donors of the aid (upward accountability) or to the beneficiaries of the aid (downward accountability). The basis of whom the NGOs tend to be accountable to is often dependent on the kind of donors from which they source their funding. NGOs often have limited power over the decisions they make about the programmes they run for their communities. There are always conditions attached to how the funds are to be allocated and used (Lancaster, 1999: 2; Wiggins and Cromwell, 1995; Mog, 2004).

Based on the idea of the conditionalities that come with aid, there have been criticisms relating to the legitimacy of NGOs as agents of social change (Glennie, 2008). These criticisms are based on questions around the autonomy of these organisations (Sanyal, 1991; Clarke, 1995). Along with this criticism is that of the recognition of the significance of the size of the NGOs. There have been research findings that have shown a strong correlation between the size of the organisation and the implications of the form of politics that the organisation engages with. It was found that the bigger the NGO in terms of resource capital, the more the interests of the organisations would be aligned with the interests of its donors as opposed to taking seriously the politics of the development initiatives. (Meyers, 1995, Uvin et. al, 2000; Gauri and Galef, 2005; Edwards, 1999).

Hellinger (1987) makes the suggestion that the real issue is not how the organisations source the funding per se, but rather that the organisation needs to be conscious of its position and be very cautious as to not have its own goals overwhelmed by the donor agencies. This is because although NGOs can be successful in reaching the poor, their dependence on donors does impact on their autonomy, accountability and flexibility (Brodhead, 1987; Van der Heijden, 1987). In opposition to this view are scholars who have argued that the real problem is that NGOs are not really accountable to anyone and as a result lack the fundamental skill to be self-critical, which would bring about actual change in the system (Riddell and Robinson, 1995: 49). Downward accountability is seen as being very important since it alters the degree

of marginalisation of the poor. That is to say that NGOs that have prioritised the needs of their recipient community as opposed to the conditions set by the donors, could help reduce the marginalisation of those living in poverty (Kilby, 2006).

Concerns about the accountability of NGOs led to a shift in the attitudes about how programmes of development should be carried out. Advocates of participatory and people-centred development argued that in order for NGOs to be more effective they would need to ensure that the recipients of the aid participate in the programmes that are instituted in their communities (Uphoff, 1985; Tandon and Kak, 2008: 83). As a result of this there was a move towards more participatory programmes as a means to be more inclusive of communities. Another added benefit of these kind of programmes is that they were seen as a good way to democratise the processes of development. There has been much debate about the real benefits of such programmes that have evolved to form a fundamental part of the development programme and thus part of the key principles of NGOs. This is because although defenders of such programmes argue that there are many communities that have benefited and thus been empowered as a result of these programmes, the stereotype of these programmes only benefiting a few has not yet been eradicated and much criticism is directed towards whether or not these institutions are effective at all at creating a more democraticised space (Uphoff, 1993; Korten, 1987; Ackerman, 2004).

Uphoff (1999), Clarke (1995), Frantz (1987) and Thorpe (1994) all make the argument that NGOs can enhance the democratisation of civil society because through their programmes, a process of learning occurs and thus over time appropriate technologies and organisational models are structured for achieving a better connection between the different roles that are played by the state and civil society as a whole. This is because these NGOs are able to truly be a site of conflict for different interests that exist within the community. Through this process more voices are able to be a part of the decision making process of development initiatives as opposed to merely relying on the institutions of the state alone to deal with issues of welfare. This is because what effectively happens is that through the participation of these NGOs an additional platform to influence state policy decisions is created. It is this capability to mobilise around important issues that make some argue that NGOs are an essential part of development (Clarke, 1995 Frantz, 1987; Brown and Ashman, 1996; Bratton, 1989).

The idea that NGOs can help democratise political space has not gone unchallenged. There is a growing criticism that directly relates to the question of democratisation and which argues that over time and through the process of professionalisation, NGOs no longer represent or are inclusive of the people they purport to serve (Bebbington, 2005; Roy, 2008). There have also been scholars who have argued against the notion that NGOs help democratise development because they argue that public participation does not automatically exempt initiatives form being captured by the local elite. There is the strong argument that has been articulated by White (1996:143) through the phrase; "sharing through participation does not mean sharing in power", which echoes the point against the assumption that participation directly translates into democratic practice. Furthermore, there have been instances whereby the general community still lacked the ownership of the projects despite public participation. This thus was an indication that these participatory development programmes are still vulnerable to manipulation by those in power (Platteau and Gaspart, 2003; Fritzen, 2007). This is a point that connects all the different criticisms discussed in the different sections above. This is because although the criticisms look at different aspects of the impact that NGOs have on the recipients of aid, the overall issue that they attempt to address concerns the relations of power that underpin the perpetuation of poverty in communities.

Criticisms of Education NGOs

The above issues have also been raised in relation to education NGOs in particular. Rose (2009: 221), Bertonelli and Brar (2012) and Fielmua and Bandie (2012:49) highlight the important roles that education NGOs have played in changing the lives of the people in different impoverished communities. Rose (2009) states that there is evidence to suggest that education NGOs have been able to provide better quality education to children who had been be excluded from state provided education. However, she does acknowledge that not much is known about how the provision of education by NGOs has impacted on the access to higher education or livelihood outcomes. Aikman and Unterhatter (2005) argue that education NGOs have assisted in influencing policy and providing training that has combated issues of gender inequality. Bertonelli and Brar (2012) have also argued that the partnership between government and NGOs in India has worked well towards the goals of universal education and thus reducing the inequality within the different communities.

Education NGOs have their benefits, but have also been criticised on the basis of the influence they have on the state's education policy. Pillay (2010) argues that there are issues that are based around donor interests and capturing of the initiatives by local or international elites in a way that marginalises the recipient community. Pillay (2010) draws from his own experiences with an education NGO in Ethiopia to argue that the culture, languages and educational prospects of the community are undermined because of the imported education philosophy that is based on the idea of "modernising" the Ethiopian community. Archer (1994: 224) criticises education NGOs on the basis that they are caught in service delivery they cannot sustain. Furthermore education NGOs can act as agents of privatisation, which is problematic because this leads to further state withdrawal from taking responsibility for its citizens. Another problem has been that it is also not easy to determine the effectiveness of the organisations in affecting change (Mitlin, 2001: 379)

Conclusion

The debate around NGOs and their impact on reducing poverty in the communities in which they work is one that is burdened with many complexities (Clarke, 1995; Meyer, 1995). There is much more that needs to be done in order to fully understand the implications of these powerful organisations in global politics.

Although there are many positive attributes accredited to education NGOs, these kinds of NGOs are still subject to the same kind of critique of NGOs discussed earlier sections. Some NGOs approach education in a way that does not adequately recognise the political dimensions of the current education crisis and does not facilitate a space whereby the access to the education provided by NGOs is able to make a meaningful contribution to altering the power relations that exist in society.

Chapter Three

South Africa's education system: past and present struggles

Introduction

According to the South African constitution Section 32a (1996); "Every person shall have the right to basic education and to equal access to educational institutions". This means that the South African government recognises that the provision of education in the country is rightfully the responsibility of the government. Besides the idea that education is recognised as a basic human right in the country's constitution, another pressing reason for the recognition of education being the responsibility of the government is arguably the concept of why education is so vital for any society. There is a general consensus that the *telos* of education in society is that of cultivating and encouraging a culture that produces the kind of people that a country wishes to have as part of their citizenry.

Drawing on scholarly work that goes as far back as the ideas of Aristotle, Shaw (2005: 30) describes how education is a fundamental public responsibility in that it is able to produce virtue in citizens. This is to say that through education individuals are able to realise and understand themselves as part of a citizenry. Being a part of a citizenry means that people are able to participate and play a role in ensuring the successful functioning of their society. This is an idea that is also echoed by Modisaotsile (2012: 5-6) when she asserts that the first and foremost reason why education is so important in society is because it is the basis of how societies reproduce themselves. Therefore education stands to be more than just about the present, but also about the kind of future a society envisions. The idea that education nurtures good citizens is also echoed in the South African Schools act no. 84 of 1996 which informs the policy towards the provision of education (Department of Education, 1997).

Moving away from the philosophical arguments that justify the state's responsibility for the provision of public education, the importance of education for society can also be explained with the use of economic terms. Education is important and is justifiably the responsibility of the state because it is through education that a state can ensure an adequate and skilled labour force. This is an idea that is based on the human capital model which suggests that education improves the level of individuals' productivity thus contributing to a state's economic growth

(Department of Basic Education, 2013:5; Jansen and Taylor, 2003: 8). A sustainable labour force is needed in order for any state to undergo economic growth. The idea of developing human capital in order to ensure the state's economic prosperity tends to be the key concept as to why the subject of "human development" is of much importance to working towards socially responsive economic and political systems (Modisaotsile; 2012: 1).

Based on the above, the topic this research project is concerned with – that is, NGO involvement in education in South Africa – would seem to be one that should be marginal because if we understand education to be the responsibility of the state then questioning the role of NGOs would seem somewhat irrelevant. However, as a result of the history of education in South Africa, as in many other countries on the African continent, it is no secret that the education provided by the state was and still is to a large extent differentiated along lines of socio-economic class and race. As a result of this deep-rooted history of differentiated education, NGOs have been heavily involved with the provision of education to a significant proportion of the population. In the South African context, beyond the provision of education services to the marginalised section of the population, many NGOs have also played an important role in advocacy aimed at improving the state's provision of education. Due to the role that is being played by NGOs in assisting the state to honour its responsibility to the public, having a conversation about the state of the education in South Africa without acknowledging and critically examining the influence of NGOs is denying an important force and arguably a valuable resource that is a powerful agent in the current education system. This chapter thus begins with a discussion on the state of education in South Africa, demonstrating why NGOs have become involved in the education sector and why there is a need for research about education NGOs.

Education in South Africa
Pre-1994, the South African education system was characterised by deliberate differential educational provision to the various racial groups. South Africa had nineteen departments of education that were racially, ethnically and religiously divided (Jansen and Taylor, 2003: 1; Mouton, Louw and Strydom, 2012: 1211). Those members of society who were recognised and classified as being white were privileged over the other races and provided with a very high level of education. On the other hand, black South Africans received an inadequate education that was characterised by schools that were poorly resourced in terms of study and

teaching materials, underqualified teachers and a curriculum that was based on reinforcing the ideas of black inferiority that would ensure that black South Africans were only educated enough to acquire low skilled occupations (Pillay, 1984:3-4). This is the state of the education system that that was inherited by the post-apartheid government in 1994. Since then the ANC government has made various attempts transform the education system.

Although the South African education system has undergone some significant changes since 1994, South Africa has commonly been identified as having an underperforming education system because there are multiple indicators that show that despite the recognition that education is a pressing priority and many resources being channelled towards its improvement, the interventions have not been very successful in sorting out the problems that are faced by South Africa in relation to the provision of equal education for all its citizens. Although there is much negative talk around the subject of education in South Africa, it is important to commend the post-apartheid government for all their policy efforts towards transforming education in the country. Besides the post-apartheid government declaring their commitment to the education of their citizens in the constitution, one of their key strategies towards recognising their goal to transfer education was what Sayed (2008:1) refers to as decentralisation of education. This strategy included the introduction of two key legislations: the South African Schools Act (SASA) and the National Norms and Standards for School Funding (NNSSF). These two broader scale changes were accompanied by a number of changes from different levels of the education department. The department of education has implemented a number of "pro-poor" policies such as, most notably that of declaring approximately 60% of schools in the country fee-free (Dieltiens and Meny-Gilbert, 2012: 127).

The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), which is recognised as the ANC government's first attempt at dealing with the deep rooted socio-economic problems of South Africa, aimed at a model of what they understood to be the integrated growth programme that would build and sustain the capacity for all citizens to have access to the basic amenities. One of the key factors that was recognised as being essential is that of transforming education in the country (Reitzes, 2009: 6). The White paper on education and training detailed all the changes that the government was to implement as a means of improving access to education for all citizens. The white paper also detailed the values and priorities of the new government

and recognised that the growth of the country's economy was not possible without human resource development (Sayed, 2008:3). Based on this it was proposed that government fund ten years of compulsory schooling, along with early childhood educare, and adult basic education and training (Reitzes, 2009: 9). Subsequent to the introduction of the RDP, in 1996 there was a shift in the overall reconstruction framework to a framework that attempted to have South Africa recognised as a "developmental state". Even with this shift, the state still had education as part of priorities. This is because as a "developmental state" it recognised the crucial role of the government in providing public goods including education. This was part of the comprehensive human development strategy (Reitzes, 2009:12).

Another intervention was in the higher education sector with the introduction of the Education White Paper 3 in 1997. This document detailed the plans for the development of a single co-ordinated system with new planning, governing and funding arrangements for higher education institutions (Sayed, 2008; Jansen and Taylor, 2003). In the single co-ordinated system, schools are ranked according to a poverty index by the nine different provincial departments of education. Based on the conditions of the school and the community in which the community is situated, schools are allocated different rankings that affect the percentage of the national budget that they receive from the department of education (Jansen and Taylor, 2003:27). This is because the prevalence of poverty in the communities is often reflected in the schools that were found in those particular communities (Mouton, Louw and Strydom, 2012: 1213). The budget is divided amongst the schools according to five quintiles, from the poorest to the least poor schools (Jansen and Taylor, 2003: 27). The schools in the poorest three quintiles receive a greater proportion of the budget and are usually classified as no fee paying schools. Other schools can charge fees to supplement the funds they receive from the state.

The combination of the different education policy interventions arguably has had some positive impact on the education system in the sense that there are some notable improvements to the access to education in the country. According to the guidelines given by the universal millennium development goal, South Africa is on track because it is able to ensure that 18.5% of the annual budget goes towards education. It is estimated that over 98% of all children in South Africa are actually enrolled in schools (Modisaotsile, 2012: 2). South Africa has been found to have the highest enrolment rate in Africa and also highest rate of

girls' participation in schooling on the continent (Jansen and Taylor, 2003:2). The access to education has improved to the point that there is a high enrolment rate for the children between the ages of 7-15 (compulsory years), although there are very low levels of completion. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) estimates that there is a completion rate of only 44% of all the children that are enrolled in the system at the end of their supposed completion period at grade 12 level (Dieltiens and Meny-Gilbert, 2012: 129). On another assessment account, the 2012 general household survey indicated that there has been a notable improvement in the number of citizens who had not received any education at all and who are now able to receive some form of education. In 1996 the proportion was 19.1% of the population, but in 2012 this was found to only be 5.8% of the population (Hamilton, 2014:50).

The access to education for South African citizens is steadily improving at primary level but there has been great concern about the achievement gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged schools in the country. Fleish (2008:2) argues that South Africa has two systems of schooling that co-exist. One is well-functioning and is mainly composed of historically white and Indian schools which are well resourced and responsible for educating the current middle class across all race groups. The second system which is composed of the majority of the population who are poor and predominantly black is characterised by gross underperformance, dysfunctional management and poor classroom practices. This can also be substantiated through different statements that have been made by various government officials when asked to comment on the state of education in South Africa. In February 2011 Mrs Angie Motshekga, the minister of basic education was quoted having said that she did not believe that the South African education system as a whole can be said to be in crisis, but rather that the education of black children was in crisis. Subsequent to this statement, national planning minister Mr Trevor Manual in June 2011 made the statement that the findings of his office was that the quality of schooling was sub-standard, especially in the schools found in the townships (Modisaotsile, 2012: 2-3).

The impact of the above mentioned problems on the performance of school also appears to be substantiated in Bloch (2009) when he presents the argument based on the National Planning Commission (NPC) research that showed that only 1% of African schools are high performing as compared to 31% of former white schools. This research brought to light one

of the major concerns regarding the South African education system. The concern is that South Africa has a highly racially and economic class differentiated system. The issue of the substandard education that is provided to the racial group that constitutes the majority of the population is an issue that is also addressed by Hamilton (2014:51-52) when he looks at the problem of the high levels of youth unemployment in the country. Furthermore Hamilton substantiates these points by highlighting the results of World Economic Forum Global Information Technology report that ranked the South African education across all disciplines 140th out of 144 countries globally.

There are various indicators that support the statements above. These include low exam results and low levels of literacy and numeracy amongst the learners (Modisaotsile, 2012: 4; Mouton, Louw and Strydom, 2012: 1215). All this shows that schools are still facing inequality of accessing resources and this is inequality is divided along the lines of race and socio-economic class. Research has shown that there are high dropout rates especially in the rural areas. Furthermore, an insufficient number of children complete school all the way up to Grade 12 and even fewer qualify for university (Dieltiens and Meny-Gilbert, 2012: 28). Hamilton (2014: 50-51) points to another problem facing the education system in South Africa, namely the issue of the quality of scholars that the system produces. This is because it has been argued that the education system is currently unable to produce a sufficient number of critical thinkers and literate and skilled citizens.

Dieltiens and Meny-Gilbert (2012: 127) point out that the commonly used explanation for school-drop out in South Africa is that the high costs in an environment of absolute poverty drives learners from school. However, their research looks deeper into this problem and they make the argument that it is the learner's subjective experience of poverty in contexts of inequality that elevate the risk of drop-out amongst children in South Africa. While it is proposed that poverty remains the driver of school drop-out in South Africa, Dieltiens and Meny-Gilbert (2012) provide new insights into the manner in which poverty sees children and youths leaving school before completion. In their research they conclude by pointing out that absolute poverty is a direct problem and the cause for school drop-out. However, this is not clear in the case of SA considering that enrolment rates are extremely high despite the high levels of poverty. They connect this to another study that was conducted around 2002 that showed that poverty was likely to delay the enrolment into school. Subsequent to these

initial findings, a study conducted by Hosegood and Lund in 2005 (cited in Dieltiens and Meny-Gilbert, 2012: 131) showed that the introduction of the grant system was able to impact this in a positive way and increase the rate of enrolment in schools. However, despite the existence of social grants and of free schools, this does not absolve the families from having to pay other access costs of education such uniforms and transport that is needed for the children to attend school. The inability of poor families to absorb these costs also constitute as a barrier to accessing schooling for many learners.

The education issue also received the attention of the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) around 2003 in a response to the effects of the GEAR policy on the education system. In consultation with a number of communities that were identified as being predominantly populated by poor residents, the APF found that there was consensus across the country and people were complaining about the following factors with regards to the education system; "unaffordable school fees; discrimination in admissions policies; overcrowded classrooms and too few schools; demoralised teachers; over-age students being turned away; no transport subsidies but long distances for students to travel; inadequate school meal schemes; poor school facilities and equipment; water and electricity cut-offs; declining pre-school facilities; expensive school uniforms" (APF, 2003). This is an issue that Seroto (2012: 80) touched on when she looked at the impact of market liberalisation on the education system. She points out that the ideas that underlie market liberalisation which were adopted in South Africa are a function of a larger framework that is structured in a way as to ensure for the mobility of global capital. However, the problem with this is that this framework does not take into account that there are links between the provision of education and the social and economic needs of the poor people. Furthermore in the case of South Africa, the institution of market liberalisation policies was aimed at creating a middle class that could compete with the rest of the middle class in the world. However, market liberalisation excluded the poor and thus led to an increase in inequalities in the country. These inequalities are what has been seen to directly impact the functioning of the education system. This is a point that is substantiated by van der Berg (2010) when he argues that wage inequality rather than historical access to wealth is responsible for the high levels of inequality amongst South Africans.

The youth are considered to be one of the most pressing concerns of the crisis when it comes to education in South Africa. Not only is there an undeniable link between the labour market

demands and the quality of education, but there is evidence of the systemic disempowerment of the youth through the conditions that are bred by depressed socioeconomic circumstances. The low quality of education that is associated with schools that are found in areas that are burdened with high levels of poverty tend to limit the chances that can be afforded to the youth that are affected by such circumstances (van der Berg, et al, 2011). This is an idea that is also expressed by the Director-General of UNESCO when he argues that there can be no escape from poverty without a vast expansion of secondary education (Rotberg, 2013:56). This is expressed in the context of addressing the need to provide better education for the future generations in order to ensure Africa's economic development. Robert Rotberg looks at the implications of the outcome of the final year of secondary schooling results, that is to say the matric results that happen on an annual basis. Upon successful completion of final secondary school examinations the pupil receives a national senior certificate (NSC) (Rotberg, 2013:59). The students who do well in these exams and score high points are deemed ready to pursue a tertiary degree, whilst those who do not are usually seen to fall in between the cracks of the system. It is estimated that approximately 400 000 young South Africans who sit down for the examinations fail and form part of the group of young adults who are considered as being "outside of education". It has been also been found that this group approximately consist of about 3 million young adults between the ages of 18 to 24 years (Rotberg, 2013:59).

Besides the crisis of the high failure rates of the pupils who fail to obtain the NSC or perform well enough to be admitted into the tertiary institutions, there is also a skills mismatch in the country. In 2012 it was found that vocational education is in no better state than the formal education sector in S.A. The national unemployment rate was seen to be as high as 40%, but there was a shortage of skills with an estimated 800 000 positions that couldn't be filled as a result of this shortage (Rotberg, 2013:60). In dealing with the problem in this particular age group, the South African government has attempted to intervene through increasing the number of education centres and having a more regulated system for Further Education and Training (FET) institutions.

Another issue that has been of constant concern is the influence of trade unions on the schooling system. The South African teaching profession is highly unionised (Letseka, Bantwini and King-Mckenzie, 2012: 1197). Due to South Africa's apartheid history, there are

four main teachers' trade unions: the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), the National Professional Teachers Association of South Africa (NAPTOSA), the Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysunie (SAOU), and the National Teachers Union (NATU). These unions are mostly divided along racial lines, with SADTU being the largest union (Letseka et al., 2012: 1197). Mouton, Louw and Strydom (2013: 37) argue that due to SADTU's political history and current affiliation with COSATU which is part of the tri-partite alliance, the union should have played a key role in the transformation of the education system post-apartheid. However, SADTU has arguably played a detrimental role due to their own political interests that are prioritised at the expense of teaching and learning in the country. SADTU tends to be at loggerheads with the government over labour issues. Monare (2011 in Letseka et al., 2012: 1200) makes the argument that SADTU exploits black education as a bargaining chip to protect its members. This is because SADTU membership base is predominant in previously disadvantaged communities and when SADTU hosts prolonged strikes, it is the previously disadvantaged communities that are most affected.

As a means to have a better standardised schooling, the Department of Education proposed a new National Policy on Whole School Evaluation (WSE) to monitor and evaluate the performance of the schools and the teachers (Mouton et al., 2013). SADTU has actively opposed the random monitoring of schools by the department of education. One of the main reasons given by the union as a justification as to why they are opposed to the attempts to ensure the improved quality of education at all schools through classroom visits has been cited as the legacy of apartheid. This is based on the National Party legacy of suspicious random monitoring of schools during the apartheid era (Holborn, 2013).

All the issues briefly discussed above are the basis of the justification of referring to the South African education system as one that is in crisis and in need of attention from all sectors of society. The issues that are highlighted above indicate that although the history of education in South Africa was mainly about a struggle for access to education, the conversation has now shifted towards the quality of the education that is provided and thus this issue is one that is very complicated because it deals with a number of issues of power on different levels of governance and participation. The following section looks at the case of education in the Eastern Cape and specifically the state of education in Grahamstown.

Education in the Eastern Cape and Grahamstown.

Grahamstown is a small town that is found in the Eastern Cape which is one of the poorest and the most rural of the nine provinces of South Africa (Reitzes, 2009:3). Although there has been a steady improvement, according to the most recent (2014) annual national grade 12 results, the Eastern Cape is also the worst performing province in terms of education amongst the nine provinces. The report of the executive portfolio committee on basic education that was tasked with investigating the issues that are faced by schools in the Eastern Cape in January 2013 found that the trends in the Eastern Cape are not very different from the general trends nationally. The problems that were recognised were a lack of qualified teachers in core subjects, lack of infrastructure in the form of libraries and adequately equipped classrooms. 80% of schools that were visited in the Eastern Cape were found to be dysfunctional at least to an extent. There were distinct differences found between fee-paying schools and no fee paying schools in terms of the resources that they had at their disposal. These differences were also evident in the performance of the learners' examination results (The Portfolio Committee on Basic Education, 2013).

Education in Grahamstown has also come under intense observation. What makes Grahamstown an interesting space is that the town is arguably predominantly an education town and is identified as having some of the finest top performing schools in the country as well as being the home of Rhodes University. At the same time there are striking discrepancies between the private schools, the former white schools and the previously disadvantaged schools. Westaway (2014a) compares the results of the different types of schools highlighting the race and class differences in educational achievement. Grahamstown has a total of nine public high schools. Three of these are fee paying schools located in the suburban area, whilst six of the public schools are no fee paying schools located in the townships found in the outskirts of Grahamstown. In the 2013 schooling year Grahamstown was recorded as the tenth worst performing district in the country with a 61.3 percent overall pass rate. However, this does not represent the state of all nine schools found in the area because there are significant differences between the results of the no fee paying schools and the fee paying schools. Based on the 2013 matric results, the three fee paying schools jointly achieved a 97 percent pass rate whilst the six no fee paying schools managed to achieve 49 percent pas rate overall. Furthermore, 78 percent of the passes from the fee paying schools

were bachelor passes (the requirement for university entrance), whilst the no fee paying schools only achieved 11 percent bachelor passes (Westaway, 2014a:4-5).

Grahamstown Area Distress Relief Association (GADRA)

Bringing together the earlier discussions on NGOs and on education in South Africa, this research project critically examines an education NGO, GADRA Education, working in the Grahamstown area. GADRA education has been involved on a formal level by being involved directly with the provision of education services in the Grahamstown area. This section provides some background information about GADRA education by looking at the history of GADRA education and the foundations of the work that they do in Grahamstown

The Grahamstown Area Distress Relief Association (GADRA), was established in 1957 and is Grahamstown's oldest still-existing NGO. It was first established as a welfare type of organisation that provided the residents of the Grahamstown township community with different forms of aid. One of the original interventions was that of a soup kitchen and the organisation's first involvement with any form of education initiative was when it established a division called the 'GADRA Educational Welfare' in the 1960s. The other two divisions that were a part of this organisation were the GADRA Advice and GADRA Feeding Scheme. The education initiative came about as a result of a concern for the wellbeing of the underprivileged high school pupils of Nathaniel Nyaluza, which was the only black high school in Grahamstown around this period. As a response to the financial needs of the pupils, a new bursary scheme was established. This bursary came in the form of assisting the beneficiaries with textbooks. At its initial stages the funding for the bursary scheme came entirely from a few privileged residents of Grahamstown and only went towards pupils from Nathaniel Nyaluza High school. However, this changed overtime as the bursary scheme expanded and students from other education institutions were also allowed to benefit from the bursary scheme. The bursary scheme later went beyond just supporting high school pupils and also supported a few college and University students (van der Mescht, 2014:8).

The bursary scheme still exists in a different form (to be discussed below) and has benefited many local residents. Although this programme did improve the conditions for accessing education for a number of locals, there was another concern around accessing education in Grahamstown. This was that after high school the local Technical College in Grahamstown

only accepted a limited number of black people into its secretarial and commercial courses. This meant that a lot of people were being denied the opportunity to access post school training. As a result of this GADRA Education responded to this need by opening a Commercial Centre in 1986. The Commercial Centre offered courses in typewriting, office practice and communication. GADRA education continued to evolve over the years and in 1994 the organisation opened a Matric School that was a response to the demand for an institution which would assist learners to repeat their final year 12 exams so that they could pass if they had failed previously or, if they had passed, improve their marks so that they could qualify for further education.

In 2011 GADRA was faced with a financial crisis after the organisation had been reporting deficits on an annual basis. The organisation was in trouble and recognised that if they were to survive and be sustainable they would need to rethink their approach to the work that they do in the Grahamstown community. This point led the appointment of a new manager, Dr Ashley Westaway, and the development and introduction of the new strategic plan. This strategic plan was to serve as the detailed plan of action that would direct the aims and the values of the organisation moving forward (van der Mescht, 2014: 9).

According to the strategic plan for the period of 2012-2015, "GADRA education asserts that inadequate education is the most important problem facing South Africa today… [I]ts role is to work is to work amongst the interests of the citizenry, which in their case constitutes the entire population of Grahamstown" (GADRA, 2012: 13 and 17). As an organisation GADRA is involved in both the provision of education services and advocacy work for the Grahamstown community as a whole. While GADRA has a long history of providing educational services, the inclusion of advocacy work is a more recent development that is part of the new strategic plan of the organisation. The inclusion of this role is based on the idea that "it would be unstrategic for GADRA to deliver services that did not contribute to the fulfilment of its mobilisation and transformation goals" (GADRA, 2012: 17). GADRA professes that the mobilisation they seek to achieve is one that aims to make an effective contribution to the fulfilment of mobilisation and transformation goals of the entire education system (GADRA, 2012:18). Before GADRA introduced advocacy work as one of their key functions they already had a long history of providing education services and they continue to do so. The organisation is of the belief that delivering education services alongside their

advocacy work gives them credibility and that the provision of education services gives an "insider, experiential knowledge which places the organisation in a strong position to conceptualise and implement effective advocacy work" (GADRA, 2012: 18).

As part of its broad based strategy, GADRA education currently consists of four different programmes: the Matric School, the bursary programme, the Commercial Centre and the Primary Education Support and Development programme (GADRA, 2011).

The Matric School programme provides an opportunity for young adults who have already written their final national senior certificate exams to have a second chance at passing these exams, if they failed, or at improving their marks in order to get into tertiary education. Students who attend the Matric School contribute by paying low tuition fee payments that are differentiated based on what each family can afford to pay relative to the household income. The bursary programme provides financial assistance to students who have been through the GADRA Matric School and perform well enough to qualify for university. The Commercial Centre provides further technical and commercial training to a mixed group of adults. Both the Matric School and the Commercial Centre mainly deal with groups of 18-24 year olds (GADRA, 2012).

The Primary Education Support and Development (PESD) programme is a much more complex section of the GADRA education programmes. This is because unlike all the other three programmes which operate independently of public schools, this project is a joint partnership with all of the primary schools found in the Grahamstown Townships. In this way the project deals with a very wide variety of stakeholders including the pupils at the schools, the educators and the parents of children at the schools (GADRA, 2013). Through this programme GADRA is able to provide teachers with support in terms of training workshops and supplementary classroom teaching materials. They also organise parent-teacher workshops where the teachers and the parents get to work to together on practical ways in which everyone can play a role in improving the learners' levels of literacy.

The parent-teacher workshops that form a part of the work that is done by GADRA education were initiated as an extension of the PESD. This is because the organisation recognised that the pupil's low levels of literacy need an intervention that goes beyond the classroom

(GADRA, 2012). As stated in the previous sections, a key problem with education in South Africa is the low levels of numeracy and literacy amongst children in the earliest of the developmental stages (Hamilton, 2014; Modisaotsile, 2012:3-4; DOE, 2013: 24; Mouton, Louw and Strydom, 2012). There have been numerous efforts to deal with this problem because it is the foundations of bigger problems later. In partnership of the Rhodes University Education Department, GADRA Education has put together programmes that are aimed at changing the lives of many children at the earliest stage currently possible. This involves supplying parents with material resources such as books and crayons that the learners can make use of at home to help their learning. The workshops also focus on advising parents on other ways they can make learning fun for learners around their own homes. In their work GADRA has found that many children get left behind in the system because there are a lack of resources and innovative ways of building a culture of reading and learning in the pupils. With this GADRA has made it a priority to engage the community in accessible ways in order to encourage children to get involve in literature and numeracy projects from a young age.

Conclusion

There is overwhelming evidence that shows that the South African basic education system remains inefficient despite various reforms that have taken place over the years. The legacy of the Apartheid regime still weighs heavily on the current education system. This remains a matter of great concern because of the correlation that is found to exist between poverty and low levels of education. The provision of quality education thus becomes a vital component to what is need to ensure the alleviation of poverty.

The recognition of this relationship between poverty and poor education forms the basis of the programmes that form a part of GADRA education's interventions in the Grahamstown community. In the context of education in the Eastern Cape, GADRA education asserts the idea that education should not merely be approached through welfare programmes that are aimed at treating the symptoms of the education crisis. Instead programmes aimed at dealing with this problem should seek to bring about the transformation of the public education system through engaging with the wider societal issues as well (GADRA, 2012). Based on the literature surveyed in the sections above, this research will contribute to the conversation by looking at the challenges that are faced by NGOs that are led by seemingly politically

conscious members of society. The research is aimed at understanding how the leaders of GADRA education deal with the challenges that are a part of working in this contradictory space.

Chapter Four

Thinking through the role of NGOs in education in South Africa: Lessons from GADRA education

Introduction

The Grahamstown Area Distress Relief Association (GADRA) is a long-standing NGO whose development can be argued to be one that reflects that of the broader NGO developmental sector in South Africa. Established in 1957, the organisation has a community based welfare background that came about in response to the poverty that was a result of the "system of racial capitalism that was enforced through the Apartheid regime" (Besharati, 2013: 10). In more recent years, in a similar manner to many other NGOs, it has moved away from its exclusive focus on welfare to include more of an advocacy role. As a result of its long standing history this chapter takes a look at the lessons that can be learned from the experiences of this particular organisation in relation to the criticisms that are often levelled against NGOs.

The chapter makes use of individual semi-structured interviews that were conducted with some of the different division heads of the organisation as a means to gain a better understanding of the thinking that goes into running a formal education NGO in Grahamstown. Shijvi (2004) argues that one of the biggest problems with the work that is done by NGOs is that there seems to be a tendency for acting rather than thinking through the work that these organisations do in the communities. This results in the depoliticisation of development work in that NGO workers ignore or are not conscious of the power relations that undermine the work that they do in these respective communities. Interviewing key members of GADRA Education allows for exploration of the ways in which NGO workers understand their work and whether and how they reflect on the potentially depoliticising role they might be playing. Although simply focusing on the leadership of the organisation has its limitations, it is useful in that it provides a perspective on how the people within these organisations deal with the contradictions of being in a position of power relative to the members of the community. The research looks at the different challenges that are expressed by the leaders of the organisation in relation to the body of literature that has been introduced in Chapter 2. Drawing the connection between the academy and the practice of NGO work,

this chapter aims to provide a picture of the contradictions that are related to the debate on the depoliticisation of poverty by NGOs.

As discussed earlier, NGOs have received much criticism in relation to the work they do. This is because in many respects they are seen as agents of social control as opposed to being the agents of social change that they often profess to be (Lehman, 2007; Escobar, 1995). Different scholars have taken various positions on the issue of NGOs, development and the relations of power that are fostered within the communities to whom they provide aid. Although as previously demonstrated there is a lot of literature that grapples with different kinds of NGOs that exist and the work done in different areas of development initiatives, the notable problem with this debate is the vast generalisations made about NGOs. As Riddell and Robinson (1995:15) argue, NGOs do a wide range of very different work. For example, some NGO programmes are directed towards influencing macroeconomic policy, whilst some programmes are simply aimed at empowering individuals as a means to confront issues of inequality within a society (Riddell and Robinson, 1995:15-16). Although there are evidently vast differences between NGOs, these differences and the particularities of the NGOs are often not acknowledged. The reason why this point becomes of great importance to this research project is that GADRA is an organisation that appears to be in line with the general understanding of what constitutes an NGO. However, upon deeper exploration of this organisation it is without doubt that GADRA education has its interesting particulars that have to be acknowledged. One interesting component of GADRA education is that while it started off with working within what can be argued was a depoliticising welfarist approach, it later developed into an organisation that professes to be working towards the transformation of the entire Grahamstown community through the transformation of the education landscape (GADRA, 2012).

GADRA argues that improved formal access to schooling is not enough to bring about the transformation that is needed in the South African education system. They point out that there is inadequate epistemological access to education and that this issue is key to understanding the problem because access is only meaningful when schools ensure epistemological access and support children's systematic learning of basic skills, knowledge values and practice (GADRA, 2011: 4). The term 'epistemological access' points to the need for more than just physical access to schools. In order for students to really access education, there needs to be a

true transformation of how teaching and learning takes place in schools. Such transformation means taking into account the diverse cultures and different backgrounds of the learners and teachers by accommodating these in the classroom (Mouton, Louw and Strydom, 2012: 1211). This means aiming towards an education that both the pupils and teachers will be able to take ownership of as a means of cultivating a culture of innovation and knowledge production.

As an organisation GADRA education makes use of an approach that is premised on different programmes that all work together towards addressing different constituencies that contribute to the running of the education system. This is because the organisation recognises that there are multiple issues that require different types of programmes in order to shift the power relations that affect the schooling system within the Grahamstown community. The organisation recognises different sets of groups that have to be considered when dealing with the question of how the poverty in the Grahamstown community affects the distribution of power amongst the members of society in relation to the functioning of the schooling system. This has meant that the programmes that are designed by the organisation are all aimed at addressing the different problems that concerns each particular group.

Due to the multifaceted levels of power that GADRA is confronted with depending on the programme in question, the engagement with the stakeholders is largely differentiated and demonstrates an interesting approach to dealing with the question of poverty through education. As a result of this differentiation, the responses to the questions that were raised during the interviews were particular to each section of the organisation and the power struggles that are involved in relation to each of the different constituencies. The interviews that were conducted with the leadership of the organisation brought to light the thinking behind the shifts within the organisation and thus the consequences of making such changes to an organisation with a long history within a community. The data collected was also able to bring to light that there is actually a very complicated relationship that exists between technocratic, depoliticising approaches to development and approaches which recognise and attempt to tackle the power relations which perpetuate the cycle of poverty in communities. The next section relates some of criticisms that have been given of NGOs to the practice of GADRA by exploring how GADRA leadership understands and has attempted to deal with

the different problems associated with work done by NGOs within communities that are burdened by poverty.

The Depoliticisation of Development

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the most prominent arguments against NGOs is that having assumed a position of power, the organisations tend to act without a complete understanding of the communities in which they work and without addressing the structural problems that perpetuate poverty within the communities that are the recipients of aid. The concept of aid has long being considered to be quite problematic because it has been used as an exercise of power with little consideration for the recipients of the aid. Through the provision of aid an unequal distribution of power results amongst the donor party and the recipient of the aid. Furthermore, NGOs often treat poverty and disempowerment as an economics malfunction in need of technical solutions as opposed to being understood as a political problem (Lancaster, 1999: 6-7).

The neo-liberal approach to development is criticised for its tendency to narrow the understanding of what constitutes poverty. This is because it assumes a position that simplifies the solution to poverty. Technocrats argue that with greater education and training, some redistribution and lighter market regulation; poor people will participate better in the market (Johnston, 2005:135). This is because neo-liberalism understands the markets as the main focus of any solutions to be devised in order to deal with the socio-economic problems that exist. NGOs which work within a neoliberal context are criticised for carrying out a process of depoliticisation by attempting to work towards stabilising and institutionalising power relations that function as a means of preserving the status quo. This is achieved by normalising practices that follow a set process of achieving what is understood to be development that would result in the reduction of poverty in a society (Gorden, 2004: 2). The result of this approach has been that aid workers understand poverty as being a result of the actions of the poor themselves and not the result of the structures of the institutions that govern the society (Manji 1998; Ferguson 1994). The response programmes that are engineered by development workers with a technocratic mind-set are the kind of programmes that seek to alleviate the suffering that is experienced within the communities of the aid recipients, while they do very little work in terms of bringing about radical changes within

the communities. In this way, Shivji (2004: 690) argues that the current context of neoliberal hegemony has resulted in NGOs playing a supporting role for the capitalist system.

The following section looks at the responses of GADRA leadership in relation to questions about the work that the organisation does and how they deal with the problems that relate to depoliticisation. In dealing with this criticism of NGO work, GADRA leadership demonstrated quite an in-depth understanding of the Grahamstown community and the challenges that are faced by the community. Their approach to the work that they do in their efforts to achieve their aim to transform the Grahamstown education landscape is one that is directed towards empowering the recipients of the aid, whilst also being engaged in political struggle through advocacy. The advocacy that they are engaging in is one that mobilises various sectors of the Grahamstown community in order to change and bring about an awareness of the broader issues in the educational institutions. This is clearly demonstrated through the responses of all the interviewees to the question about how they understand the role of the organisation and the work that they do within the community

The GADRA education manager Ashley Westaway who joined the organisation in 2012, gave the following response to the questions around the development of the programmes that are currently being run by GADRA within Grahamstown;

> When I was interviewed [for the post of manager of Gadra education] I made it very clear that my interest is transformation and if I am appointed to the position I must, from the board, have a mandate to transform the organisation, otherwise I am not interested in the position. I am not interested in just salvaging the programmes. I want to try and use the programmes to do something bigger in Grahamstown. And they appointed me with that mandate … the situation analysis is crucial to getting a proper contextual understanding and the formulation of strategy in relation to that analysis and bearing in mind the programmes of the organisation (Westaway, interview, 5 February, 2014).

The comments made by Westaway in relation to his vision for the organisation upon his appointment as the manager demonstrate an interesting point that is emphasised by Shivji (2004:690) when he argues that the fundamental problem with NGO work is that it is focused

on action while inadequate attention is given to thinking through the work done by the NGO concerned. This results in organisations lacking a grand vision for their society and thus misunderstanding the context of the society in which the organisation works. Westaway states that the programmes at GADRA are not simply about the day-to-day running of the organisation, but rather about working with the community to change the distribution of power in the Grahamstown society. This is also a point that is emphasised in the quote below, where Westaway argues that part of the work that the agency is concerned with doing with the Grahamstown community is based on the idea of creating a space that has the potential to enable the people to exercise their own agency in a way that will influence the structures that contribute to the perpetual cycle of poverty.

> We think that the parents' agency is deliberately squashed by the professionals, by the teachers. If you have a situation whereby a parent goes to D.D Siwisa [a local school] trying to find out about a useless teacher, that teacher will insist on talking English to that parent. The whole manner of tactic is used to disempower and disorganise parents…. The education establishment deliberately and relentlessly disorganises and disempowers parents and tries to tell them they know nothing because they are uneducated and I am the one that is educated and I am the one that can speak English. So that is the context for us. … [Our] understanding [is that] we are going to have a counter programme here. We are going to have a programme where we focus on trying to give the parents practical tools to increase their agency in their own homes. Let's leave the state out of it, let's leave the school out of it. Let's talk about education responsibility in the home, because if we can do that, what we are actually doing is giving the parents confidence in themselves… before asking questions about the right to education and the obligations of the state (Westaway, interview, 30 May, 2014).

The response given by the primary school literacy project manager, Ms Kelly Long, also demonstrates a consciousness of the importance of having a greater view of the work done by the organisation relative to the challenges that are faced by the members of the community.

> We can't necessarily create employment for all the parents or change the home background, but what we can do is to introduce parents to the idea of needing to

support their children's education and how they can do that. So we developed a series of workshops that we do with parents and it's been amazing to see the buy in that we have had, the turnout and the fact that the number of parents gets bigger and bigger every single time. We do simple things. We talk about how children develop from 0-9 years old. All those little milestones. We talk about it in a very accessible way and when we talk about gross motor development, we talk about how that impacts them in the classroom later on, why it's important later on and what are the little things you can do that are accessible to everyone that is going to help (Long, interview, 28 July, 2014).

In this extract, Long points to the question of the willingness of parents to get involved in their children's education. Research has shown that parental involvement in schools has a significant influence on a child's academic success (Comer and Haynes, 1991: 2). One of the issues that have been considered as a contributor to the poor quality of education in South African schools has been the lack of parental involvement in the schools. According to research conducted by Holborn (2013) poverty and illiteracy are the main issues that hinder parents from getting involved in the education their children. GADRA education has found that beyond the problem identified above, there have been deeper underlying issues that contribute to the lack of parental involvement in schools. As the comments from Westaway illustrate, one of the major issues is that of the imbalanced power relations between the educators at the schools and the parents of the pupils. This is a point that is highlighted by DOE (2013:7-8) when they argue that school governing bodies (SGB) are meant to be one of the ways in which parents could get actively involved in their children's education, however the power imbalances between the professional managers of the schools and the less educated members of the parent community prevent these structures from being effective.

Westaway and Long affirm the idea that transformation in education can be brought about through the empowerment of parents. This is because one of the characteristics that are associated with socio-economically depressed communities is that of high levels of illiteracy. In such cases the educators that are found to be in a position of power which systematically prevents the parents from being able to engage or have meaningful involvement in their children's education. As a means to address this issue, GADRA education has introduced a parent engagement programme where they look for ways to work with parents in ways that

will empower them to get involved with supporting their children in any way possible. This initiative looks to address one of the underlying reasons that contribute to the cycle within these communities as opposed to merely applying more pressure to the schools. The model takes on a broad based approach to dealing with literacy problems at the level of the parents. The aim of this initiative is to encourage the expansion of a culture of knowledge that transcends the boundaries of the school establishment. This approach goes beyond the welfarist approach that characterises many NGOs and is in line with the shift towards development education which empowers the individuals of the community (Broadhead, 1987: 2).

The empowerment approach to development dates as far back as the 1970s when there was a shift from service delivery to looking at ways of enabling the people affected by poverty to have greater influence in the decisions that affect their lives. The basis of this argument was that forming activist groups that pressure governments to reassess their policies would contribute to the redistribution of power in society (Riddell and Robinson, 1995: 35). This approach to NGO work is also understood as being sustainable because it transfers the ownership of the programmes run by the organisation unto the recipient community and in this way the organisations move away from being "benevolent patrons" of the community (Riddell and Robinson, 1995: 36). Although the service that is provided by GADRA education through the parent-teacher workshops appears on first consideration to merely deliver a service that is being inadequately delivered by the state, the value of this service is that it disrupts the relations of power between the schools and the parents, by giving the parents tools to become more confident and more involved in their children's schools. Through this programme GADRA education shifts the conversation on education to one that is about the political as opposed to merely the technical. As I will argue below, these workshops also help GADRA education foster a relationship with the broader Grahamstown community which assists them in their goal of mobilising the entire community to influence change in the schooling system.

A strength of GADRA Education appears to be its ability to build relationships of trust with local schools as part of its attempt to shift power relations in Grahamstown. Long's comments below give some idea of the relationship GADRA has been developing with the schools:

… no school has said to us we are not allowed to come into the classroom and we don't make appointments to visit teachers, we just pop in, which is not allowed by SADTU [the South African Democratic Teachers Union] for any Department of Education employee. So if you are from the Department of Education, you have to make an appointment at least 48 hours before going into a school or a classroom. So because we are not wielding a big stick and we are there to help and we are coming from a very sympathetic perspective, we haven't had any teachers say we are not allowed in the classroom. We have had teachers who are not doing their jobs and who are not terribly motivated, who allow us to come into the classroom and see even that which is quite amazing, but it means that we have been able to put kind of a level of accountability that hasn't been there before, and I think that makes a very big difference… We have had a success with the high schools' principal forum and now we have just started a primary school forum. So we have a constitution that is being signed by 14, I think, principals so far. That I think is going to be very powerful as far as advocacy. There's been for a very long time, a kind of divide and conquer philosophy in the Department of Education. So keep the schools in their own little bubble and what I tell school A, I don't necessarily have to tell school B or if I tell school A and school B, principal A feels like one little person stuck in something that they have no control over and so they don't fight against it. And principal B feels the same. But if we can get principal A and B together, it might be a little bit easier for them to fight certain things (Long, interview, 28 July, 2014).

GADRA education has made efforts to build a relationship with the teachers at the different schools as a means to also support the project that they do with the parents. The teachers at the schools are involved with the parent engagement. As a result of the relationship that they have built with the teachers in assisting them with their other struggles with their politics with the state, they are able to better mediate the relationship between the parents and the teachers. GADRA ensures that the teachers are involved with the parent engagement programme. This platform creates a space whereby the teachers and parents are able to work together in order to deal with problems and come to a point whereby they realise that they are working towards the same goals as opposed to being on opposite sides of the fight for improving the quality of

education. This is evident from the contributions that are made by both teachers and parents to constructing the programme for the parent engagement workshops. This also evident from the independent evaluation of GADRA which states; "Several respondents referred to the success and importance of this [parent engagement] venture.... The programme received strong support from parents in particular who rated it highly in their annual assessment of GMS at the end of both 2012 and 2013" (van der Mescht, 2014:41)

The active participation by both the parents and teachers in deciding the programme for the workshops is also significant in the sense that it allows the parties to have a sense of ownership over the development of the programmes. This is important in relation to the debate on depoliticisation in that it ensures that participatory development is not merely occurring at a superficial level, but rather at a transformative level. This kind of participation is the kind that White (1996:146) interrogates in connection to the politics of participation. In her research White seeks to determine whether or not the kind of impact that NGOs have on the communities with which they work with is one that leaves the people empowered. Part of the empowerment process with which this kind of transformative participation is concerned is one that would leave the people of the community with a sense of consciousness about the relations of power. This consciousness is seen as instrumental in assisting the community to reach a place where they have greater confidence in their ability to make a difference in their lives through their own actions transforming the structures around them. This idea of transformative participation appears to be in line with the principles expressed by the leadership of GADRA and the aims of the outcome of their parent engagement programme.

> … I honestly think we are not going to have any change in our education system until our parents understand the issues and they get angry. And they understand that their children are being hard done by and they start demanding change. So that is where we are working. That's the advocacy work we are doing. So we do a lot of educating parents to understand what their responsibilities are as far as their children's education, but also their rights and what they have a right to fight for and what they have a right to expect… Next year is going to exciting from that perspective because the schools will be conducting governing body elections. [In] most of our township schools, the governing body didn't really function…. Our governing body system in this country gives the school a lot of power ... if they

45

actually use it. We hope eventually to get kind of a city wide situation where governing bodies are talking to each other and supporting each other (Long, interview, 28 July, 2014).

The above quote from Long also illustrates how GADRA would like to use their role to empower parents so as to gain enough confidence to confront state organs and change the conditions in the schools.

As expressed in Chapter 2, NGOs are criticised for being another mechanism of social control (Lancaster, 1999: 230). NGOs seem reluctant to break down the societal structures that contribute to the perpetual cycle of impoverished communities. Although this has been seen to be the case in some instances, Edwards (2004:15) shows us that there are well documented instances whereby NGOs have been successful in playing a role in mobilising opposition to authoritarian rule and thus bringing about change. Given the size of GADRA education this criticism has some truth to it. It is not possible for GADRA education to easily influence the education policies at a national level because they are not in a position of power. However this does not mean that the organisation perceives itself as being powerless in contributing to the altering of the education landscape. GADRA education takes a stance on "disrupting power" through using service delivery as a launch pad for an advocacy campaign (Westaway, 2014b). The leadership of the organisation argue that through providing excellent services to the Grahamstown community the organisation is able to gain the trust of the community. This trust enables GADRA education to occupy a position in the community that gets them support to carry out their advocacy campaign and mobilise the community as a whole. This is also supported by the findings of the evaluation report: "an example of how a body like this can empower parents duly presented itself in November 2012 when parents decided to organise a march to present a letter to the municipality demanding access to water which had been dysfunctional for 18 months" (van der Mescht, 2014: 41-42).

Westaway's comments on the Matric School also show how the services GADRA Education provides can be used in order to contribute to attempts to shift power relations.

…With the Matric School it was saying, how do we tactically and strategically use the Matric School as a launch pad into the high schooling sector in Grahamstown? So that was the shift strategically that needed to be made in relation to the Matric School. In relation to the bursary programme, we asked the question how do we change this from a mechanism that just gives a little bit of financial support to a mechanism that can carry on giving a little bit of financial support, but at the same time we use to really engage with those recipients of those bursaries – to really engage them as people and to see if we can't use that programme to start mobilising some of the energy and capacity that exists on campus, to bring that capacity in to being part of the solution to the education crisis. So, we have basically taken those different programmes and asked different questions in relation to them and in trying to answer those questions there is to some extent some synergy across the programme (Westaway, interview, 30 May, 2014).

As discussed in Chapter 3, there are various problems that affect the education system in South Africa in different ways. As a result of this it is not possible to just deal with one problem in the hope of dealing with the education crisis. The implication of this is that multiple interventions are needed in order to work towards a solution. In isolation each programme that forms a part of GADRA's intervention in the Grahamstown community might appear to be technocratic and thus depoliticising, but upon critical interrogation of the problem it is evident that through the use of a number of different interventions GADRA Education is able to contribute to altering power relations in Grahamstown. In order to understand the impact of the work that it is done by the organisation, it is important to look at the links between the different programs. Furthermore, the context in which GADRA operates comes with its own sets of particularities that affect the ways in which poverty can be effectively politicised. In the South African context, the empowerment of the poor requires a complex process that deals with creating a space where there is potential for people to exercise their agency in a way that will alter the structures and thus institutions that contribute to the perpetuation of poverty in society. As discussed in Chapter 3, one of the problems that contributes to the inequality in the education system is that of the marginalisation of the poor in relation to this system. This marginalisation is responsible for

the perpetual cycle of poverty (DOE, 2013; Jansen and Taylor, 2003). This means that the community as a whole needs to look for innovative ways of changing the system.

GADRA Education is able to provide useful skills to the Grahamstown community. However, rather than simply seeing their role as addressing certain 'lacks' in the community, GADRA Education's approach suggests that what is valuable about these skills is the potential of what these acquired skills do for the people in the community. This is not to say that acquiring skills automatically translates to the shift in the power in society, but empowering people with skills through the provision of services does open up the potential for a space where development can be politicised. The cautious and critical manner in which GADRA engages with the issues relating to the education in Grahamstown is evidence of how the leadership of the organisation takes seriously the contradictions of working as an NGO and reveals ways in which an organisation can deal with these contradictions.

This point can be illustrated through the example of the Matric School. On first consideration, the Matric School seems to simply be filling a gap that has opened up because of poor provision of education by the state. By offering a limited selection of subjects to young adults who seek to have a second chance at obtaining the National Senior Certificate, the Matric School appears to be engaged in a form of "crisis management" for the students that have not been successful the first time around in their attempt to obtain their NSC. It thus appears that the Matric School simply operates within the existing system, helping prop up rather than challenge a dysfunctional education system.

However, upon further investigation of the work that is done by the Matric School, a more complicated picture emerges. The interview with the principal of the Matric School shows how she sees the school as operating in a context of injustice rather than simply regarding the school as filling in a 'gap' in the education market. She comments:

> It really upsets me to think of the failures out there who really shouldn't be failures…. There are a lot of problems where students choose the wrong subjects, where to put the blame for that could be a number of factors…. This is very horrific and they are bright students. Really, they are bright. There is nobody who should be failing…. (Lancaster, interview, 29 July, 2014)

Lancaster demonstrates an understanding of the problem from a perspective that realises that the students that are mostly deemed to be failures are in fact in most cases disadvantaged by their circumstances or simply failed by the education system itself. What has been found interesting and celebrated by the school are the numbers of students who are able to improve their low matric pass into bachelors pass which thus then qualifies them for entry into tertiary institutions after their year at the Matric School. In other cases students who have failed their first attempt at obtaining a NSC are found to do remarkably well at the end of their year at Matric School and in so doing are able to have access to a whole lot more opportunities. This is evident from the following recorded results: by the end of 2009, GADRA had afforded a total of 1 257 students over 16 years the opportunity to improve their Matric results and achieved an average pass rate of over 85% over this period. In 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 GADRA achieved 95 percent, 92 percent, 86 percent and 97 percent overall pass rate respectfully. In 2013 Matric school achieved 52 Bachelor passes out of a total of 117 students (van der Mescht, 2014: 32).

The teachers at the Matric School attribute these outcomes to the combination of the programmes that are run by the school. The school places a lot of emphasis on developing the students' "soft skills". They are also invested in ensuring that the students at the Matric School are offered a well-rounded education that goes beyond just the approved curriculum. In partnership with the Rhodes University Philosophy Department, the school offers a course in critical thinking skills. In this way students are challenged to think about different moral issues and other societal dilemmas. As part of the support system at the Matric School they also have the benefit of the "Pathways to Opportunities" programme which is run by Ms Kirkaldy who is a teacher at the school. This programme is one that looks at developing a sense of self awareness in relation to the career opportunities that exist. The programme has become one of the fundamental programmes at the GMS because it has offered the school unique insight into the problems that are faced by the young people at school leaving age. The finding has been that socioeconomic circumstances of students have a significant influence on how students think of their futures.

> What I find is that if you come from a background where your parents are
> working or sometimes where your parents have been to tertiary, you are much

more aware of [that] reality… you are much more aware of what options there are, but also you are much more aware of the competition to get in. So your more middle class students often have quite an idea, not always, but [often] have quite an idea of what opportunities there are. If you come from a family where people are not working or have not gone to tertiary, students aren't really aware of the opportunities. What they have is a kind of [idea that] "I must go to university and then it's the magic button and everything will…I will then have lots of opportunities" (Kirkaldy, interview, 1 August, 2014).

The work that is done in this regards is able to assist students to make different choices about their lives. The Matric School teachers emphasise that although they realise that there is only so much they can do given their resources and the gravity of the education crisis in the Grahamstown area, they are still committed to doing the all that is possible to empower their students to exercise their agency. GMS offers the students practical tools that they can use to change their circumstances and also gain confidence in their own abilities.

We need them to see that they can work hard and improve….all you can do is work with respect. Work with respect of what these kids are facing, what these kids are handling and hopefully they feel that (Kirkaldy, interview, 1 August, 2014).

…You are upgrading, opening up opportunities for yourself…Get them to understand what they are aiming at… (Kirkaldy, interview, 1 August, 2014)

The statements that are made in connection with the students at the GMS might appear in some ways to be in line with the depoliticising notion of problematising the poor and instituting interventions that are aimed at helping the poor to "fix themselves". However, in a paper delivered at the *Thinking Africa* 2014 colloquium on NGOs and Social Justice at Rhodes University, Westaway made the argument that in their experience at the GMS they have found that the students that come there have been indoctrinated by a hidden curriculum of the dysfunctional schooling system to the point whereby they internalise their failures. When thinking through the problem, Westaway (2014b) makes use of Bourdieu's theory of the function of education in modern societies, Westaway argues that the South African

education system is very functional in its dysfunction. The education system is very efficient in legitimising inequality in society. Westaway makes the argument that the hidden curriculum effectively discourages the "black child" from having any high expectations for their own lives and actively acts convince them that the inequality is as a result of their own inadequacies and therefore justified (Westaway, 2014b:2-4). This argument is interesting and although while further research is needed to know if Westaway's understanding of how the South African education system works is correct, his comments as well as those from Kirkaldy demonstrate the way in which GADRA Education consider it important to do more than simply provide education for the learners with whom they interact.

The above section looked at the ways in which GADRA education has attempted to deal with issues that are directly linked to the problem of the depoliticisation of development work. It is clear that the leadership of GADRA is conscious of the challenges that are faced by the Grahamstown community and show a dedication towards creating programmes to directly meet the needs of the people. GADRA also values the relationships they have built with the different stakeholders of the community and take seriously the idea of advocating with the community as opposed to advocating on behalf of the community. The next sections will build on to this by looking at issues around NGOs and state sovereignty.

The Undermining of the State by NGOs

Another criticism against NGOs is that the work that they do tends to undermine state institutions. This is because they are often seen to drive agendas that contribute to the loss of the right of states to self-determination (Shivji, 2004:691). This becomes an important issue when it comes to education because, as briefly discussed in Chapter 3, education is understood to be the responsibility of the state. This issue also relates to the question of depoliticisation because by undermining the state, NGOs can prevent broader systemic change from happening. NGOs are known to play an important role as citizen education providers at all levels of education. This is because citizenry education goes beyond the school classrooms into areas of real life due to its inherent interface between the school and the community. Given that NGOs operate in a space that deals with social issues this means that they are not only contributors but are responsible for the context of citizen education throughout their everyday activities (Ribeiro, et al, 2012).

One area where NGOs have been quite involved is in challenging governments to improve upon the kinds of citizen education they offer (Ribeiro, et al, 2012: 39-43). Whilst some NGOs challenge this lack of citizen education, many others have been criticised because they have been complacent in promoting the kind of education that is not aimed towards encouraging an active citizenry or critical thinking. Critics argue that NGOs ought to be concerned with the developing the consciousness of the recipients of education programmes and mobilising citizens to exercise their human agency. This is an idea that is considered to be essential for the promotion of a society that is truly free (Ribeiro, et al, 2012:33). However, NGO workers are often content with working within the confines of the already existing system and thus failing to deal with the real problems in education.

In the previous section, the leadership of GADRA education constantly refer to how the state has failed the students who are beneficiaries of the programmes run by GADRA education. As a result of this failure GADRA has had to step in and provide aid for the population that is excluded from receiving quality education. In this way, it could be argued that GADRA does undermine state institutions by intervening in an area that is rightfully the responsibility of the state. However, considering that GADRA education has different programmes that work together and form partnerships with public schools and Rhodes University which is also a public institution, one could argue that GADRA does not undermine the state institutions but works to enhance their effectiveness in the community. They are looking to use the lessons gained from their experiences in the community as a means to mobilise and work with society as a whole to better the conditions of the schools in the Grahamstown area. This does not limit the right to self-determination but rather increases the possibilities to bring about change. The aim to use the organisation's experience as a means to gain credibility to advocate for quality education speaks to the idea that is articulated by Shivji (2004) when he argues that the struggle for the expansion of space for the people is a positive endeavour that is able to reconstitute the state in a democratic direction and deter the abuse of state power. This idea leads us to the following section on the issues of NGO accountability and democratisation.

Accountability and Democratisation

Chapter 2 presented the various criticisms that relate to the accountability of NGO work and the extent to which NGOs either promote or obstruct democracy. Many of these criticisms

relate to how NGOs source the funds for their programmes. This is because the financing of these organisations almost inevitably influences the degree of autonomy, the accountability and the legitimacy of the organisation (Sanyal, 1991; Nelson and Dorsey, 2003; Edwards, 1999; Lancaster, 1999). This section looks at the responses of GADRA leadership to questions relating to the question of the accountability of NGOs and their role in democratisation.

Edwards (2004) discusses the role of civil society in relation to capital by placing emphasis on how organisations that form part of civil society, such as NGOs, tend to adopt agendas that relate closely to the interests of the donors. The implication of this is that the funding that these organisations receive from their donors comes with conditionalities. Upward accountability (to donors) as opposed to downward accountability (to beneficiaries of aid) has been one of the major criticisms levelled against NGOs. Although there is some merit to this criticism, it is also true that it is not as simple as it has been represented by some of the critics. It would be disingenuous not to acknowledge that there have been some shifts at a global level. NGOs have been seen to have increasing influence on the policies of the international financial institutions. It is through this influence that new norms are being established and the notions of accountability being interrogated (Edwards, 2004: 15).

As a result of the complexity of the funding issue it is important for this research project that we engage in a critical discussion about how GADRA engages with their donors. Although there a number of factors that we can argue an NGO has complete control over, such as the everyday functioning of the organisation, some factors are strongly influenced by external factors such as their funding. GADRA education is no exception to the funding issue. As an organisation GADRA has multiple sources of funding as it is funded through private donations, companies and other donor organisations. Among its funders are ABSA Bank, Mary Slack & Daughters, Brait, HCI, New Settlers, DG Murray Trust, and PM Anderson (van der Mescht, 2014: 17-18). They also derive an income from tuition fee payments, interest and sundry income (GADRA Annual report, 2013). However, the bulk of the organisation's income is from and donor organisations and private personal donations and as a result of this the organisation has also faced challenges in relation to financing their projects. The high point of GADRA's financial challenges was witnessed in the 2011 financial year when the organisation was at the brink of closure because of running into

deficits on an annual basis (van der Mescht, 2014: 14). The organisation was said to have reached a point whereby it was no longer seen as fundable by its donors. Although it is not really clear as to why this had become the case, it was clear that the organisation needed to do something that would attract donors if it had any hopes of survival. In the quote below Westaway engages with the challenges that are involved with donor funding and explains how GADRA dealt with these challenges:

> ….the organisation [GADRA] had got to a stage where it was unfundable and the only way to salvage it was to make it fundable again. So the foundational tool with regards to making it fundable was to put a strategic plan in place. In my mind if there wasn't a strategic plan in place we couldn't put up a coherent compelling argument. So all of the funding proposals over the last, well since then for more than two years now, have basically flowed out of that. That's the origin of the resourcing mission, it's in the strategic plan. So the strategic plan is a statement to the outside world that this is what we are trying to do. Every time we try and resource the organisation, it must be aligned with the strategic plan because that is what gives the organisation its coherence and so on…. So the strategic plan was a very important document in relation to both changing the direction of the organisation and to saving it financially (Westaway, interview, 5 February, 2014).

In his response to the questions about the funding for the organisation, Westaway expresses the difficulties that are associated with funding an Education NGO. Westaway's response also touches on the challenges of NGOs operating in a space that constantly has a moving target. Chapter 3 conducted a discussion on how education is understood to be the state's responsibility and therefore NGOs operating in this field face limitations in many respects in terms of sourcing funds for their programmes. The organisations are also limited in the programmes that they can initiate because they are required to comply with the curricula that are accredited by the national Department of Education. An example of this limitation is seen in the case of the discontinued accreditation of the Molteno materials that were used as part of the school curriculum as part of the primary school literacy programme conducted by GADRA in various primary schools in the Grahamstown community (GADRA, 2013).

As explained in previous chapters, NGOs rose to prominence as a result of a shift in global ideology. It was largely recognised that states were failing to provide essential services for their citizens. Private donors thus began to explore ways in which they could fund development projects that would go directly to the people (Riddell and Robinson, 1995: 9) Welfarist organisations were therefore seen to be the best means of achieving these objectives. However, over time these sentiments have changed and a different agenda was put on the table. People have become more critical of welfare organisations and look towards projects that do something beyond social service delivery. The shift looked towards programmes that encouraged development education and advocacy (Brodhead, 1987: 4-5).The influence of dominant ideology and how it impacted GADRA education is reflected in the response that Westaway gives to account for why the organisation had reached a point whereby it was no longer fundable and the reforms that the organisation had to undergo as a means to make it fundable once again;

> It is the state's role to deliver education and therefore it is understandable that there aren't … many overseas donors that are prepared to put money in education, because education is government's responsibility. Bringing in a component that went beyond just service delivery, beyond just the Matric School, beyond just the literacy programme and started looking at using those service delivery programmes as a basis to bring about wider scale transformation…. The essence of that fundability issue which I think relates to your research interest is that in my view the previous GADRA Education, namely an organisation that only delivers services and is therefore welfarist, [was only] plugging the gaps in relation to the limitations of the South African state (Westaway, interview, 30 May, 2014).

The same time the organisation had to find a realistic way of balancing the needs of the people and the demands of attracting funding. Westaway demonstrates a pragmatic stance on the issue. He makes the argument that the organisation recognises that it has to have some grounding principles that focuses their goals. This is why they have placed so much emphasis on the strategic plan.

You know what it's more about, I think, it's about being pragmatic. So if there's a donor that just wants to support underprivileged kids, you give them a proposal to contribute to the costs of kids at the Matric School. If there's a donor that wants to see transformation, you give them that proposal. But we don't give proposals to donors that are outside of our strategic plan. Our strategic plan is what guides us. So we have commitment to offering excellent services to Grahamstown people and we have a commitment to using that service delivery base to transform public schooling in Grahamstown. Everything that we do is informed by that, but we give different donors different proposals depending on alignment between objective… Know your funders and get alignment between our objectives and funder objectives without compromise our objectives. Setting up the strategic plan I know that that strategic plan was going to be more fundable than a welfare organisation (Westaway, interview, 30 May, 2014).

The point of view expressed in the quote above on the issue of donor funding demonstrates how the relationship between these kinds of organisations and its donors are not as simplistic as they are sometimes portrayed as being. It demonstrates the case that power is never completely one sided, but rather exists on both ends to be manipulated by either parties who are a part of the relationship. This is one of the points that is also made by Hellinger (1987) when he argues that one of the ways NGOs can avoid being overtaken by capital is through selective sharing of information as a means to better match donors with partners in terms of their goals.

Although the above comments show that NGOs do have some power in the face of capital, there is also the question of the downward accountability mentioned in the earlier paragraphs. GADRA demonstrates a commitment towards the objectives that the organisation set out for itself upon re-evaluation of the role that they play in the community, based on the strategic plan. Downward accountability relates to the ways in which GADRA engages with the beneficiaries of the aid. The organisation has made an effort to keep connected to the community through putting measures in place that enabled the community at large to participate in the governance of the organisation. This is accomplished through the organisation's membership policy which tried to grant membership to a very broad spectrum of people. The idea of the membership policy speaks to the issues around the increased

professionalisation of NGOs. The professionalisation of NGOs is one of the components of the larger criticisms around the depoliticisation of poverty by NGOs who undertake programmes aimed at development work. The criticism is based on the observation that the people who work in the organisations end up being more invested in keeping their jobs as opposed to doing meaningful work in the communities the organisations are working with. This is a continuous problem because the approach to the work they do in these communities tends to be increasingly technocratic as a result of this professionalisation (Broadhead, 1987: 2; Roy, 2008).

The idea behind GADRA's reformed membership policy is based on ensuring that any person associated with the organisation through tuition payment, donations, volunteer work, through being the parents of students involved in GADRA's programmes or through any other form of contribution to the effective running of the organisation is involved in the decision making of the organisation. This form of governance is an attempt at dispersing the power within the organisation. This does not mean that the organisation does not have professionals that are responsible for the programmes; it merely implies that the professionals cannot go ahead with programmes in the community without the consent of multiple stakeholders. This approach to the work that the organisation does is also potentially able to counter the possible hijacking of the organisation by capital. In practice this policy means that there is an executive committee that is elected on an annual basis. The executive committee is elected through a democratic process at the annual general meeting (AGM) where all the stakeholders of GADRA education are invited to attend. The executive committee is thus entrusted to make the decisions that are in the interest of the different types of stakeholders.

Although having a wide membership base and a democratically elected executive committee does help address concerns about downward accountability, these concerns are not completely overcome through these mechanisms. The elections take place in an AGM where it is not possible for the nominated candidates to go through an extensive process whereby the entire body of stakeholders can make fully informed decisions about who they would like to see represent them in the executive committee. Consequently, the organisation runs the risk of not really achieving the aims of having the democratically elected executive committee as it is difficult for all members to participate fully. In such a space it is likely that some individuals will end up controlling the space. White (1996) conducts a critical

discussion on the different types of participation and points out that it is important for organisations to remain critical of their participatory processes because achieving transformative participation goes beyond merely facilitating a "democratic space".

Another issue is that translating the democratic governance into the everyday running of the organisation is not a simple matter. This is because although the decision making is able to influence the greater goals of how the organisation is run, in most cases the daily interactions with the community are what make a greater impact in the way in which an NGO works with the community. This problem is one that often results from the increased professionalisation that creates a distance between the experts and the community (Broadhead, 1987: 2-3).

GADRA Education's history of previously being a white liberal welfarist organisation has meant that the management has been confronted with the struggles of professionalisation in an interesting way. This reality is demonstrated in Westaway's response to the questions in relation to the specific changes that the organisation has decided to make since its transition;

> A set of values [have been introduced], which if you have a look at the mission statement in this regard or the strategic plan, you will see that the mission statement is saying 'This is what the organisation [GADRA] is trying to do' and as an organisation that believes in social justice it needs to implement values that are consistent with a commitment to social justice, such as empathy, solidarity etc, etc… Crucially, every single person that phones the organisation or walks through the doors, we show them respect. We are respectful. We are respectful to people who structurally are our enemy. We are respectful to everybody. It's like a fundamental kind of approach. And it's almost through that, through how we behave, that I have tried to get that coherence in terms of the organisation, more than anything. It's because of the ways in which the organisation interacts with people that the organisation has been able to rally so much support…So it's also about kind of renewing the staff and building the staff to reflect what the organisation is as opposed to a stuff that reflects an old liberal white organisation from the 1950s, you know. So yeah, I mean it's a dynamic process that has to be looked at from a number of different points of view. But we are literally, we

trying to make the organisation into that what it should be (Westaway, interview, 30 May, 2014).

Westaway demonstrates a critical awareness of the dynamics that go beyond just "the big idea" behind GADRA education. The organisation is aware of the politics of the personnel that drive the work that is done in the community and the importance of transformation being witnessed as a part of the organisation itself and of not playing a paternalistic role in the community. This self-critical stance of the organisation is also very significant as it also deals with one of the criticisms against NGOs and how they fail to sufficiently interrogate the work that they do within the communities and the perception that the community has of the work that is being done by the organisation (Riddell and Robinson, 1995: 49).

Another way of ensuring downward accountability is through the conducting of evaluations of the NGO's work. It should be acknowledged that many NGOs do conduct evaluations of the work that they do with the communities they provide with aid; however, Riddell and Robinson (1995: 48) also raise the concern of whom the evaluations are aimed at providing with information. Evaluations are often approached through a results based angle that is centred on providing the donors with funding reports that will make the organisation attractive. Although this is a very significant part of keeping the organisation running, it is also very problematic because it is merely another example of upward accountability as opposed to downward accountability (Riddell and Robinson, 1995: 49). The idea of conducting evaluations is also very contentious because it attempts to quantify qualitative achievements. Riddell and Robinson (1995: 50) make a compelling argument as to how this is not possible because it is not possible to objectively measure the kind of work that is done by NGOs.

In connection with the question of downward accountability and the power relations that are inherent in working for an NGO, Westaway had the following to say:

> Whenever there are relationships, there is power. One has to set up processes in
> such a way as not to deny power, it's to try and get everybody in the
> organisation to be very responsible and to be part of a solution. I mean it's like
> we all live with contradictions. …it's about living with contradictions and

managing contradictions with as much responsibility as possible, to me (Westaway, interview, 30 May, 2014).

GADRA education has attempted to interrogate the entire organisation by conducting an external independent evaluation of the work that they do (see Van der Mescht, 2014). In this way the beneficiaries of GADRA's work had an opportunity to be vocal about the work that the organisation has been doing. This evaluation was seen as useful for the organisation in the sense that it enabled all parties involved in the organisation an opportunity to reflect on the influence of the organisation on the Grahamstown community. According to the evaluators' report, the Grahamstown community had many good things to say about the work that GADRA education does with them. The report concluded as follows: "It is rare – unique in my experience – to encounter such positive, excitement, enthusiasm and commitment in every person one speaks to about an organisation" (van der Mescht, 2014: 3).

According to the quote above, it is appears that GADRA Education has operated in a way that resulted in the community having a positive response to their programmes and thus demonstrating a degree of downward accountability. However, although this was an independent evaluation report produced by Professor van der Mescht who is not a member of GADRA education, the evaluation was still commissioned by GADRA education. This is not to suggest that the legitimacy of the report is compromised, but rather that a report that is produced by a person who is in a position of relative power to the beneficiaries of the aid and who occupies a similar social position to the benefactor (in this case GADRA) rather than the beneficiaries, has its limitations. People are most likely to see the researcher as being affiliated with the organisation and this will have an influence on how they respond to the questions about the organisation. It is therefore not always possible to gain an accurate understanding of how the organisation is perceived by the members of the community.

Conclusion

NGOs are very complex organisations and so it is difficult to assume a clear position on the work that they do with the communities. This predicament becomes particularly evident when dealing with education NGOs because education is understood to be a tool of empowerment. This study suggests that education NGOs can be instrumental in countering

the barriers to education. This is because they are able to provide access to education for people who are structurally excluded from education because of state limitations.

In the case of the crisis of the South African education system, understanding the role of NGO intervention is a difficult issue because access to education does not appear to be the root of the problem. Rather, the battle with the South African education system is around the quality of education that is provided for people who live in poverty. This crisis in relation to the quality of education thus has implications for the relations of power amongst the members of the society. Van der Berg, et al (2011) make the argument that low quality education is a poverty trap because of the possibility of class mobility that is associated with acquiring an education. This therefore places the subject of quality education at the centre of the debate on poverty alleviation.

There is overwhelming evidence that shows that the South African basic education system remains inefficient despite various reforms that have taken place over the years. This study found that although staff members of GADRA Education acknowledge that they are confronted with great challenges in terms of how to bring about changes in the education system, they are hopeful that with community mobilisation there is potential for the disruption of power relations as they exist between the state organs and the public. By showing a sense of awareness of the need to go beyond simply providing an educational service, the leadership of GADRA demonstrate the possibilities that exist for NGOs to play a role in promoting development without reducing development to the provision of services. The essence of this possibility is not principally demonstrated through the services that the organisation provides for the community, but rather in the vision of what GADRA seeks to do with the community through the provision of education services. This is not to say that having a vision for society will guarantee that the organisation does not depoliticise the process of development. The argument is that having such a vision opens up the possibilities of progressive intervention. South Africa has a long history of institutions of education being used as a site of struggle to bring about change in society. Education NGOs have the same potential as they are in a position where they can work alongside communities to change the societal structures that prevent the reduction of poverty.

This study is concerned with the question of whether and how the politically conscious leadership of GADRA education promote development in a way that does not depoliticise poverty. The research brought to light how it is imperative that people who are in positions of power relative to the community that they work with, are responsible with the power that they possess. Disrupting power relations in society is going to require a long process and consciousness that encourages people to be constantly critical of the implications of the work that they do. There is a need to constantly interrogate the idea of development and its long term impact on people and the ways in which they envision the kind of society to which they belong. It is clear from the comments made by the GADRA staff members that providing educational services need not necessarily be done in a depoliticising way. Such services can serve as a springboard for activism in the community and can help disrupt existing power relations.

Development is understood to be a process of change within society and as a result of this it is not yet possible to determine whether or not GADRA education is successful in achieving the transformation of the Grahamstown education landscape. A longer and much more in-depth study would be required in order to have a better understanding of the impact that the organisation has on the entire Grahamstown community. However, what is evident is that the organisation is able to effect some degree of change in lives of the people that have benefited and those who continue to benefit from GADRA's intervention.

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