The Balancing Forward Theory of Nongovernmental Organizational Transition in Sub-Saharan Africa

Suellyn H. Glidden, Ph.D.
Sue.Glidden@negst.edu
Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST), Box 24686, 00502 Karen, Nairobi, KENYA

Abstract

This research study explored the factors that affect a nongovernmental organization's (NGO) transition efforts and developed a substantive grounded theory of nongovernmental organizational transition in the multi-cultural setting of developing West African nations. This research study asked: What internal and external contextual factors affect an international nongovernmental organizational transition and how are the interrelationships of these contextual factors integrated into useful organizational change efforts? The study focused specifically on multi-cultural settings and on collaboration between international and national NGOs. The study used classic grounded theory. The Balancing Forward Theory that emerged groups factors affecting NGO transition into the following categories: (a) acting on mission and in relationship, (b) visioning alternative futures, (c) weighing context, (d) valuing staff, (e) building capacity, (f) partnering, (g) planning strategically, and (h) using material resources. The central linking process integrating these factors is balancing forward. This core concept of balancing forward represents the dual needs of an NGO to weigh and balance the multivariate factors affecting the organization and to maintain a forward momentum toward an envisioned future. This study indicates that: (a) responsiveness to national and local conditions is optimal in NGO transitions; (b) constant evaluation and adjustment are part of NGO transitions; (c) effective strategic planning must be flexible, adaptive, and reviewable; (d) maintaining a central mission and acting in relationship between partnering international and national NGOs in Africa form a direct and inseparable link; and (e) international and national NGOs need to collaborate in ways that are characterized by mutuality and synergy to create new "best practices."

Key Words: nongovernmental organization (NGO), transition, change, Africa

Introduction

Organizations are facing an ever-increasing rate of change in the world. Marquardt (2002) spoke of "winds of change that have compelled organizations to either learn or face extinction" (p. 2). Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), also called "'nonprofit organizations' in the U.S. and known as 'charities', 'the third sector', private 'voluntary

organizatons', and 'civil society' elsewhere, are challenged to act and change in complex international and multi-cultural settings" (Glidden & Andberg, 2006). Much of the research and literature that explores sucessful organizational change, though, has originated in the business sector of North America or Europe. In order to be relevant in an increasingly global and diverse environment, organizational theory and practice must develop international and cross-cultural perspectives, and, when anchored in the business sector, must develop nonprofit or nongovernmental perspectives (Glidden, 2006).

"Globalization," as the word implies, is pushing literally into all corners of the world and forcing the expansion of organizational theory and research beyond the bounds of American, European, or Asian orientations to include such nontraditional settings as Africa. The Commission for Africa (2005) focused world attention on the current state of under-development in Africa, on the risks of doing nothing to address African development needs, and on the potential for global growth and security by assisting African development. The final report of the Commission, prepared for the 2005 summit meeting of G8 nations, suggested the need for "a new kind of development, based on *mutual respect and solidarity*, and rooted in a sound *analysis of what actually works*" (p. 15). Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Africa have an important role in defining the new kinds of partnership and development needed (Snavely & Desai, 2001; Uvin, 1995). The impetus for this research study was to explore specific NGO transition processes in Africa as these organizations change in response to ongoing development challenges. This research will contribute to the analysis of "what actually works."

Problem Statement and Research Question

In responding to unrelenting change, international and national nongovernmental organizations in developing nations face unique challenges. A nongovernmental organizational transition program in a multi-cultural setting of a developing nation is affected by individual, organizational, societal, and global factors that are little known or understood. In addition, little is known of how these factors must be integrated in a successful nongovernmental organizational transition program in a specific context. There is, therefore, a need to understand the factors and interrelationships of factors affecting international nongovernmental organizational transition.

Glidden and Andberg (2006) reviewed some of the substantive research and the extensive literature base available in the areas of organizational development (e.g. Beckhard, 1969; Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989; Marquardt, 2002; Senge, 1992, Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross & Smith,1994), international human resource management and development (Budhwar & Debrah, 2001; Gilley & Gilley, 2002), and nonprofit organizational management (Drucker, 1990; Smith, Bucklin & Associates, 2000; Wolf, 1999). Relatively little is available from a non-Indo-European or Asian perspective. There is a need, therefore, to develop broader perspectives in organizational theory through research based in less documented areas such as Africa.

The primary question that drove this research study was: What internal and external contextual factors affect an international nongovernmental organizational transition process

in sub-Saharan Africa and how are the interrelationships of these contextual factors integrated into useful organizational change efforts?

This research study sought to forge a broader organizational theoretical base encompassing international nongovernmental organizational change. Three outcomes of the research study were (a) to add African and multi-cultural perspectives and understanding to the theory and practice of organizational transition, (b) to add to the knowledge base of NGO transition processes (in West Africa), and (c) to create an integrated theory to guide NGO transitions in multi-cultural settings.

Research Design

Grounded theory as a research approach was well suited to the research study. In the unexplored or under explored context of Africa-based nongovernmental organizational change, the parameters of research were not well set. Variables were not all known or understood well enough to formulate other approaches to research

The dual organizational context for this research study was a specific country-level unit of SIL International (formerly known as the Summer Institute of Linguistics) and a national nongovernmental organization—SIL Burkina Faso (SIL BF) and the Association Nationale Pour la Traduction de la Bible et l'Alphabétisation (ANTBA), a Burkinabé national organization in collaborative partnership with SIL BF. SIL BF is actively engaged in a strategically planned transition toward becoming an effective training provider in the domain of language development. ANTBA is a national Burkinabé organization taking leadership in translation and literacy in local languages in Burkina Faso and West Africa. SIL BF and ANTBA are linked by overlapping missions and goals and have developed a collaborative relationship

This research study was made during n eight-month period in 2005/2006. The researcher made two trips to Burkina Faso, each lasting between two and three weeks in order to collect data for the research study. During these visits the researcher conducted interviews, collected documents, participated in committee meetings, and observed work activities. Initial analysis and writing of memos occurred during on-site visits and continued when the researcher worked from another site. Five research participants interviewed were Burkinabés. The nationalities of expatriate research participants were New Zealand (2), French (2), Swiss (2), and Northern Irish (2), Canadian (1), Swedish (2), and American (2). Research participants reflected the multi-cultural mix of SIL BF and ANTBA.

The Balancing Forward Theory of NGO Transition in West Africa

According to this research study, an NGO in a multi-cultural setting in West Africa seeks to change through: (a) acting on mission and in relationship, (b) visioning alternative futures, (c) weighing context, (d) valuing staff, (e) building capacity, (f) partnering, (g) planning strategically, and (h) using material resources. The central linking process to each of the factors affecting an NGO in a transition process is balancing forward. This core concept of balancing forward represents the dual needs of an NGO to weigh and balance the multivariate factors affecting the organization and to maintain a forward momentum toward

an envisioned future. These categories and related processes form the basis for understanding NGO transition in West Africa. Each category represented in the Balancing Forward Theory will be described in turn in following sections. The central core category of balancing forward will be developed first. The remaining categories will be presented in the order stated.

Figure 1 introduces a model of the Balancing Forward Theory of NGO transition in West Africa. The model shows the key factors and the central integrating factor of an NGO transition process.
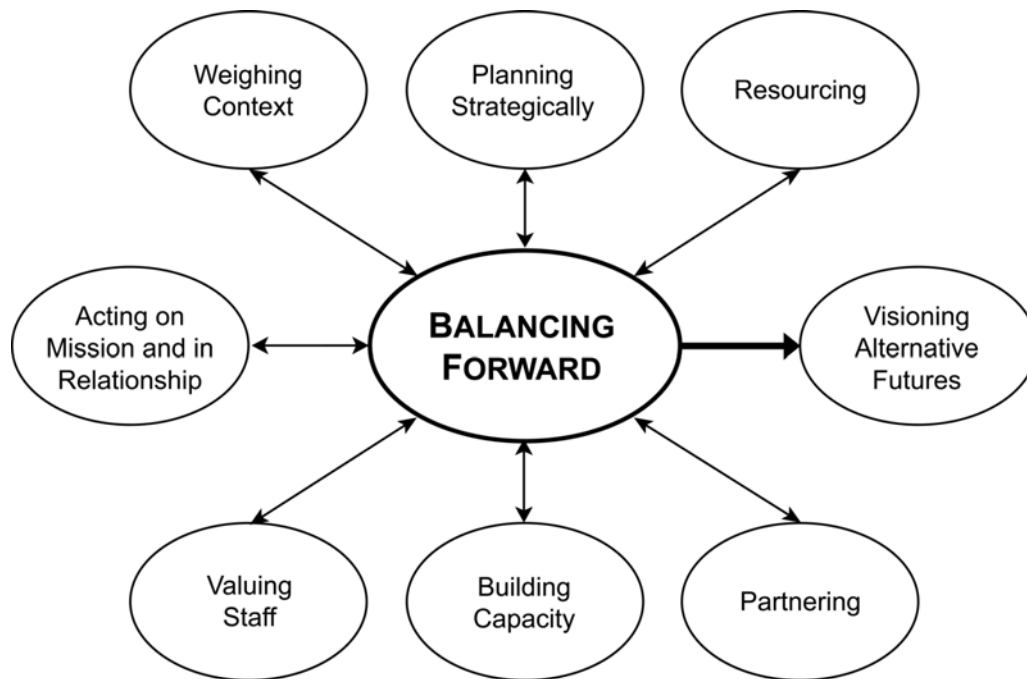

Figure 1. A Model of the Balancing Forward Theory of NGO Transition in West Africa.

Balancing Forward

Balancing forward is the core category in the Balancing Forward Theory of NGO transition. Balancing forward is a positive response process toward the complex and interrelated factors that affect an NGO. An NGO needs to weigh constantly and balance the multivariate factors affecting the organization. At the same time the NGO needs to keep a forward momentum toward an envisaged future. In this study, the core concept of balancing forward encompassed these two needs. The guiding principle of change was to "initiate change with continuity and engagement with the past." Behind this statement was the understanding that change could be destabilizing and potentially destructive if handled inappropriately. The alternative to balancing forward would be "forcing" action toward a different organizational future. Such forcing was viewed as negative, a "betrayal of trust," and detrimental for both of the partnering organizations in this study. Similarly, keeping inflexible attitudes or rigid standards and policies of the past was viewed as a major hindrance to change and moving to a new orientation in the future.

The processes within the balancing forward core concept were the organizational means used to minimize the dangers inherent in change while maintaining dynamism toward the future. Four key processes identified in balancing forward are (a) weighing, counter-weighing, and tilting; (b) retaining, turning over, or taking over; (c) building on commonalities and managing differences; and (d) adapting. These four processes are continuous and interactive.

Weighing, counterweighing and tilting. The factors affecting an NGO transition process are not positive-negative pairs of conditions, but a complex mosaic of factors with constantly varying affect on the overall organization. Change in one factor affects many others. The properties of factors that are weighed include (a) the degree of stability or fluctuation of the factor, (b) the degree of organizational control possible over the factor, (c) whether the factor impedes or helps change in a desired direction, (d) predictability, and (e) measurability. In addition, factors that link closely to core organizational values toward mission, staff, and partnership are given more value or attention. In other words, these factors have more weight than other factors. All factors need continuous assessment and evaluation. The organization weighs the relative value of factors toward leveraging organizational change and uses factors as possible to tilt the organization forward toward an envisaged future.

Retaining, turning over, and taking over. Retaining, turning over, or taking over responsibility for organizational tasks is a second sub-category process within balancing forward. Both associating organizations in this study were constantly judging their own and their partner's readiness and capacity for accepting responsibility for different aspects of the total task. Often the assessment between organizations differed. Participants cited constant dialog, joint planning, flexibility, and a commitment to avoid competition as means to handle the tensions created in this process.

Individual and organizational readiness concerns both attitudes and capacity to perform tasks. The capacity to initiate and maintain quality work was an important aspect in judging readiness and in the retaining, taking over, or turning over of responsibility between the associated organizations in this study. Both organizations recognized that each had differing assessments on organizational readiness and that there was a "disequilibrium" or lack of symmetry between the organizations. In the retaining, turning, or taking over sub-category of balancing forward the mechanisms used to balance current factors and move the transition process forward included joint planning and activities, establishing protocols to guide organizational involvements, and developing temporary arrangements with flexible planning that matched capacity with responsibility for specific tasks.

Building on commonalities and managing differences. Both organizations in this study recognized that a common or compatible overlapping mission, common faith, and common commitment to building positive relationships were the basis for managing differences that occurred between the organizations and between individuals in each organization. One participant summarized this by saying, "We are trying to build trust so that the other issues will be easier."

Adaptive mechanisms. The partnering organizations in this study used adaptive mechanisms for balancing forward that revolved around the choice of leaders, the use of time, and the maintenance of flexibility. Participants mentioned the importance of having leaders and board members who were committed to an organizational ethos of partnership and capacity-building and who were able to communicate and pass on this vision. The "personal endeavors" of leaders were a key to developing the positive climate needed for change. Using time and patience to facilitate "gradual," "incremental," and "progressive" change, and maintaining flexibility toward staff, programs, and partners were preferred means for guiding change and transition. In a certain sense, leaders were astute readers of the organizational direction, and in another sense, the leaders used time and flexibility to shape organizational directions.

Balancing forward is the core concept in the Balancing Forward Theory of NGO transition that emerged in this study. Four key sub-categories of the core balancing forward category are (a) weighing, counter-weighing, and tilting; (b) retaining, turning over, or taking over; (c) building on commonalities and managing differences; and (d) adapting. These four processes are continuous and interactive and describe how NGOs balance forward. Balancing forward as a core category provides the central process link to all other categories within the Balancing Forward Theory of NGO transition in West Africa.

Acting on Mission and Valuing Relationships

The dual basis for collaboration between the NGOs of this study was sharing in a common mission and being committed to positive relationships. As such, acting on mission and in relationship is a factor or category affecting NGO transitions.

A unifying mission is critical to an international NGO marked by diversity in the nationality, culture, language, educational, and religious backgrounds of its personnel. The central mission of the organization becomes the basis for collaboration and a focal point for drawing personnel together and deciding together a new orientation and new strategies for the future.

Collaboration between associating organizations is also based on common or overlapping missions, as was evidenced in the partnership between the NGOs in this study. Both organizations had multiple organizational links or partnerships that varied in degree and activity. The closely overlapping mission of ANTBA and SIL BF drove the partnership. The effort given to preserving the partnership stemmed from the value given by both organizations to partnership as the best means for carrying out a common overlapping mission.

"With Africans, everything is always relational," said one participant. Sound relationships were considered the best basis for building unity, for resolving misunderstandings and differences, for creating security for individuals, and for accepting changing relations between the organizations. Multiple factors militate against effective collaboration in multi-cultural settings in West Africa. Colonial histories and ingrained mindsets that are passed from generation to generation among both expatriates and Africans divide people. Individual personality and culture separate people. One African proverb states

that no matter how long a tree trunk stays in the water, it will never become a crocodile, meaning that deep differences continue despite prolonged exposure. Participants recognized that only a strong commitment to building and preserving relationships would make collaboration possible across the existing boundaries.

Acting on a common or overlapping mission and in relationship is the foundation for collaboration among partnering organizations in West Africa. Focusing on mission objectives without keeping sound relationships leads to misunderstandings and a breakdown in the partnership. A contractual basis for partnership is not sufficient in West Africa. On the other hand, focusing solely on keeping sound relationships could lead to making poor decisions or inconsistent results. Good relationships could even cloak illegal activities in the African context. Keeping the focus on the mission and keeping good relationships are inseparable. Acting on mission and in relationship together is the starting point to international and national NGO cooperation.

Visioning Alternative Futures

Within both associated organizations in this study, participants felt the direction taken for the future would be dependent on many different factors that were not certain, were not yet known, or were not under organizational control. It was necessary to move forward in a certain direction, all the while keeping other choices open as might be needed. There was a high tolerance for accepting the unknown risks

Individual staff members in both organizations needed to adjust both cognitively and affectively (head and heart) to what the future could hold. Kotter and Cohen (2002) recognized that, "clear thinking is a critical part of large-scale change" (p.180). Beyond cognition though, Kotter and Cohen stated that feelings are at the heart of change. While members recognized the need for change in the organization, participants spoke of an "aura of anxiety" that blocked change. The processes described in the core category of "balancing forward" were critical for overcoming fear and uncertainty, and for preserving unity in gradually moving ahead.

This research study captured the relatively early phase in the transition process of SIL BF and ANTBA when the necessity of change had been recognized and developed, but when several restructuring scenarios were still being tried. Both organizations, together and apart, were building an understanding of the interrelated factors affecting change, seeking to align or balance the factors as best as possible, and seeking to define the best possible future in relationship to these factors. In other words, alternative futures were being considered.

There is therefore a core process in NGO transition when the associating organizations—the international and the national NGO, work in tandem and when alternative visions for the future are being considered. The commitment to building capacity and to working in partnership demands that neither organization fix a future vision independently of the other. Rather, synergy between the organizations will shape the future. A key principle of visioning alternative futures is that an INGO does not take independent action, but actively involves associated national organizations in considering alternative futures and eventually in determining a commonly understood future vision.

Weighing In Context

A set of contextual factors affecting NGO organizational change in West Africa as represented in the data is presented in this section. In other NGO transition situations the content of these factors and their relative affect on organizational change would differ. Indeed, other factors could, in other situations, be added to those relevant in this research study.

The political and government context. NGOs must weigh political stability or instability in a given country. Government policy and regulation of NGOs, and potential collaboration must be considered. NGOs must weigh the costs and benefits of collaboration and seek the best possible arrangement. NGOs must also consider the government attitudes, policies, and activities in the specific domain of an NGO's activities.

The physical context. The physical context in which an NGO functions can either impede or help NGO activities and transitions. Critical factors mentioned in this research study were environmental, geographic, and technical.

The social and cultural context. The social and cultural factors affecting NGO transition that were represented in this research study included educational levels and standards, religious group expectations, urban-rural distinctions, ethnic group distinctions, and societal–family expectations.

The larger organizational context. The larger organizational configuration at country, regional, continental, and international level affects the country-level organization and must be considered as a factor in a transition process. The four characteristics or properties of the larger organizational context relevant to the organizations in this study concerned organization mission and ethos, organizational directives, human and financial resource allocation, and regional cooperation.

Valuing Staff

Valuing staff is a category in the Balancing Forward Theory of NGO transition in West Africa. In this research study, valuing staff was a core commitment that figured predominantly in thinking about organizational transition. Each organization tended to show the value placed on staff in different ways.

Providing a future–providing a secure future. The first general distinction between SIL BF and ANTBA in valuing staff was between providing a valid and gripping future in Burkina Faso for expatriate staff and providing a secure future through stable employment with adequate remuneration for national staff.

The context of organizational transition in SIL BF included significant expatriate member attrition or fluctuation in numbers. Participants recognized the "surface level" concerns and motivations affecting expatriate member decisions to stay or leave West Africa, but questioned whether there were underlying causes for an accelerated attrition of

experienced personnel. Expatriate members faced with changing strategies sometimes didn't know where their own contributions could be. Leaders responded to these concerns by focusing on what would motivate staff to stay involved. First, SIL BF sought to present a compelling vision of the organization. Then for individual members, leaders focused on career planning that would link member interests, expertise, and potential with organizational needs.

The focus of ANTBA was to provide a secure future for employees based on contractual employment with acceptable remuneration. This focus was, in part, in response to the social context in Burkina Faso, including high un-employment rates and extended family expectations on employed family members. Long-term career employees were recruited who had a strong contractual and legal basis for their work. There was a mutual engagement and obligation between these employees and the organization. This provided the secure future that made up one aspect of valuing staff in ANTBA.

Fostering wellbeing–providing formal education. An international NGO values staff by attending to the "total wellbeing" of staff. This includes both formal and informal aspects. Annual member performance reviews include not only work objectives but also interpersonal and personal concerns. The informal personal care for members and employees is less structured and as needed, but seeks to insure that all staff members are "hearing and being heard". During this research study, the focus of the national NGO turned on providing a formal education that would develop individual confidence in personal skills and enhance the status of individual staff members at work and in society. A primary means for valuing staff was through providing educational opportunities.

Keeping harmony–providing direction and a stable work environment. Preserving unity amid organizational change was a part of the SIL BF commitment to valuing staff. The staff members of SIL BF came from 10 different countries and spoke at least 7 different languages as their first language. Compounded by the normal range of personalities, the task of "drawing together" was a complex and necessary part of valuing staff. The national NGO kept harmony among staff mainly by providing clear direction and keeping a work environment where staff knew what was expected. The director was the accepted leader and responsible to give clear direction through a wise use of authority combined with good relationships with staff.

Building Capacity

Building capacity is a category in the Balancing Forward Theory of NGO transition in West Africa. In this research study, building capacity was a core organizational commitment of SIL BF and figured predominantly in deciding the direction the organization would take in transition.

James' 1994 survey of European and USA NGOs (as cited in Eade, 1997) showed that nine out of ten NGOs reported building capacity in the southern hemisphere as a core activity. SIL BF saw building capacity in others as an approach to the sustainable development and use of local African languages for the benefit of minority groups. The key characteristics of capacity-building were: (a) working together and sharing responsibility with

national organizations; (b) serving people and communities, listening, and responding to their concerns; (c) involving stakeholders in planning and activities; (d) doing the best possible quality of work; and (e) fostering the growth of independent national organizations.

Fostering learning as a means to building capacity. Training is often viewed as a primary means for building capacity. In this study, training had always been one core activity of SIL BF. When SIL BF decided to transition toward becoming mainly a training provider, the organization was keeping continuity with the past and deciding to build on existing strengths.

Approaches to learning–training and education. In this study, both the international and national NGOs were concerned that learning activities cover all domains needed to complete organizational objectives. Training was not limited to classroom or face-to-face training, but included workshops, mentoring, and coaching at various educational levels. It also extended to formal education programs leading to a degree.

Unresolved tensions can exist concerning the goal or goals of training. In general, INGO personnel may want to limit training to what is needed short-term to accomplish specific tasks in a project. Anything more than this would be "a waste of time and money." This was a narrow approach to needs-based and task-oriented training. National NGOs may link training to project needs more broadly and allow for a longer term and more general development of people. Training in this approach is "an investment in lives" and more process-oriented.

Approaches to adult learning in multi-cultural settings. In this research study, sensitivity to cultural differences was not as important as teaching based on mutual relationships of deep respect. Teaching adults was linked to showing patience, respect, and basing teaching on life experience. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1973) described andragogy as "a set of core adult learning principles that apply to all adult learning situations" (p. 2). The data from this research study would confirm these principles in the multi-cultural contexts of West Africa. Africans were used to adapting to many different cultural systems, including different learning or educational systems. Teaching methods, while important, were secondary to respectful relationships. Training programs in West Africa that balance academics and relationships will best meet adult learners' needs. Participants noted that effective teaching styles would include global presentations, grounded in rich culturally appropriate examples relevant to learners, and interspersed with both individual and group application sessions. Cross-cultural experience and understanding would "enhance" teaching. But again, respect and good relationships provided the only acceptable context for thinking about teaching methods.

Partnering

Partnering is a category in the Balancing Forward Theory of NGO transition in West Africa. Pragmatically and philosophically, the organizations in this research study viewed collaboration with one another and with other associating organizations as both necessary and appropriate to achieve organizational ends. Two major sub-categories of partnering relevant

to participants in this research study were (a) understanding organizational characteristics, and (b) distinguishing organizational roles between partnering organizations.

Understanding organizational characteristics. Schein (2004) distinguished three levels of organizational culture: (a) artifacts, (b) espoused beliefs and values, and (c) underlying assumptions. Two principle areas of cultural differences between the INGO and national NGO in this study involved perspectives on time and on leader–follower systems.

Perspectives on time affect individual and organizational approaches to a wide variety of problems and issues. Burkinabés in this study had a longer time perspective than most expatriate staff. Some understood this to be mainly a cultural issue. Others accepted the cultural difference, but also noted it made a great difference whether individuals were "life citizens in the country" or expatriates expecting one day to leave. Thus, the "fabric of life" or the "rhythm of life" was different between Burkinabés and temporary residents. The longer time perspective for Burkinabés affected the pace of work, decisions on when to focus on further education, and the balancing of home, work, and community responsibilities. These were surface issues that were often sources of tension.

Leader–follower systems were significantly different between SIL BF and ANTBA and a key factor to consider in partnering and in organizational change. In the national NGO, the director held great authority and responsibility. The INGO regrouped people from different countries with different laws and ways of looking at things, and accepted non-centralized authority and situational problem solving. Staff members in each organization tended to see the strengths of their own organization and the weaknesses of the partnering organization. The underlying cultural assumptions on how an organization "should" work created strong feelings and opinions. Cultural differences in leadership styles were a factor affecting partnership and organizational change.

Distinguishing Partnering Organizational Roles. Developing distint organizational roles was, in this study, important to transition processes. Four types of activities involved dealing with the past, formalizing organizational roles, weighing in "top level" directives, and seeking "true partnership".

Organizational "baggage from the past" is a factor affecting organizational change and transition and must be considered in balancing forward toward another future. Past strategies and activities create current realities and have to be factored into transition plans. In this research study, one Burkinabé had had a vision for creating a national association in Burkina Faso that would be a national "sister organization" to the INGO. In alignment with international thinking at the time, SIL BF encouraged the beginning of ANTBA through practical and moral support. Many people felt that a national NGO would greatly increase African involvement in language development without needing to address the troubling issues of "control" or finding the means to fit Africans in great numbers into what was then an international and essentially "western" NGO. The issues of control and multi-cultural cooperation did not disappear but became centered in two organizations rather than one. The existence of two organizations caused an "inevitable rivalry" as both organizations tried to accomplish similar tasks without clearly understanding their distinctive roles. Current NGO trends toward globalization would belie the need to have two organizations. But, given

separate organizations, it becomes necessary to deal with this reality in balancing forward into the future. Inherent in organizational transition therefore was the need to consider the past as it affected the present and movement into the future.

The need to formalize organizational partnership agreements is an aspect of partnering in West Africa. The positive partnership between the INGO and national NGO in this study was due in large part to the mutual commitment and work of leaders, coupled with good personal relationships. Beyond this, both organizations realized the need to create formal agreements that documented organizational roles and responsibilities. A series of protocols established areas of activity and relationship between the organizations. It was noted that "top-level directives" could be particularly important in negotiating the most sensitive or difficult of partnership issues that could not truly be solved through local dialogue. International administration in these cases could "weigh-in" to define the best possible complementary paths of action.

Finally, holding up the ideal of "true partnership" was a common thread in interviews and conversations. Leaders committed to partnership did not want to offend each other and thus "danced around each other." Likewise, staff members in both organizations needed to "get beyond worrying about cultural blunders" and be friends. Open and frank "deep level communication" was needed to experience "true partnership."

Planning Strategically

Planning strategically is a category or factor affecting NGO transition in West Africa. Organizational approaches to planning resulted in strategic planning being a factor affecting transition, but not the core factor or process, a position held by balancing forward.

Both the INGO and national NGO leaders in this study continuously thought strategically about organizational change and transition. Strategic plans, as such, often could not keep pace with the events affecting and leading to change in the organization. Annually, leaders used the time of "doing strategic planning" as an occasion to review factors affecting the organization and set general directions. But planning strategically at organizational level tended to be periodic and static and lacked the flexibility to respond to changes in the internal or external environment On a day-to-day basis leaders thought strategically using the balancing forward processes that were more interactive, intuitive, adaptive, and relational.

Using Material Resources

Using material resources is the final category in Balancing Forward Theory of NGO transition in West Africa. Viability, sustainability, mutuality, integrity and accountability, and complementarity are characteristics of using material resources noted in this study.

The first characteristic of using material resources that affects NGO planning and action, including transition efforts, is an organizational commitment to remain financially viable and to be able to sustain programs or projects once started. NGOs in this study deeply valued sustaining organizational commitments and building community capacity to sustain action after the organizations would complete their engagement. Many multi-year project

activities were dependent on annual renewable project financing. Addressing the need for viability and sustainability required constantly weighing and balancing all the factors affecting the ongoing financing of projects
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"Mutuality" is a relevant factor in using material resources. Mutuality separates the provision of financial resources from operational control and develops shared accountability between all constituents or stakeholders engaged in some part of the organizations activities. International donors must not impose strategies or procedures on the NGOs working in the field. International donor agencies, local NGOs, and local communities all contribute different things to a given program. This should be the basis for mutual respect, dialogue, and accountability between stakeholders

Upholding the reputation of an NGO is a critical factor affecting organizational activity, including change and transition. Organizational integrity and accountability were important factors for both international and national NGOs. The national and global context of NGO activity requires legitimate NGOs to have integrity and be able to show their integrity through accountability systems.

Complementary use of resources is an aspect of using material resources that affects NGO transition plans that involve building capacity and partnership. Organizational self-interest and conflict of interest are controlled through mutual planning and complementary use of resources.

Summary Conclusions and Implications

The Balancing Forward Theory of NGO transition in West Africa is first and foremost a framework for building understanding. The theory is a tool for analyzing the elements affecting NGO efforts to change, especially in the context of West Africa; for reflecting on what is going well or poorly; and for responding flexibly in an ongoing transition process. The Balancing Forward Theory of NGO transition that emerged may, hopefully, help NGOs develop mutual understanding and respect that are the basis for synergistic new solutions to problems, leading to effective action and change.

1. The core category of balancing forward is the central integrative process used in NGO transitions in Africa. Implied in the balancing forward process is that responsiveness to national and local conditions is required in NGO transitions. Both international donors and the international levels of an NGO must allow decentralization of strategies and operations in order for the balancing forward process to function.
2. Balancing forward as the core concept in NGO transition also emphasizes the need for constant evaluation and adjustment. This implies that effective strategic planning must be flexible, adaptive, and reviewable to allow and maximize NGO responsiveness to constantly changing circumstances.
3. There is a direct and inseparable link between maintaining a central mission and acting in relationship between partnering international and national NGOs in Africa.
4. Envisioning alternative futures is a necessary phase in NGO transition in West Africa. International and national NGOs need to collaborate in ways that are

characterized by mutuality and synergy. Organizational change occurs interactively and partnering organizations affect and are affected by each other.

5. Valuing staff, building capacity, and partnering are critically important core commitments of Africa-based NGOs. These categories regroup factors that need to be carefully weighed and balanced in organizational transition efforts.

6. Different approaches to personnel management tend to be present between an international and a national NGO. Differences between national and organizational cultures can cause significant tension within and between organizations. International and national Africa-based NGO leaders and staff need to understand these differences, communicate openly, and create personnel systems responsive to the differences present.

7. Understanding organizational characteristics and distinguishing organizational roles between partnering NGOs with profound organizational differences are at the crux of effective NGO transitions that involve cross-cultural partnerships.

8. In addition to viability and sustainability, NGOs are concerned with the equitable use of resources and moving beyond dependency on external donors and one-way accountability toward mutuality and partnership between donors and recipients.

For Further Research

Further research is needed in situations where a larger international NGO works with many smaller community-based organizations. Further research across time or in a broader scope of NGOs would potentially enhance or modify the Balancing Forward Theory of NGO transition that emerged in this study. Likewise, research might be conducted in other types of service-oriented NGOs to compare with the findings of this study.

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