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## **The impact of ICCO and Cordaid projects in Northern Ghana: summary of the Ghana study (unpublished)**

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# **The Impact of ICCO and Cordaid projects in Northern Ghana**

## **Summary of the Ghana Study**

Unpublished report, August 2002, as part of Impact Study Co-financing agencies

Ton Dietz

### **Introduction**

North Ghana can be characterised as the southernmost area with Sahel features. A period of drought may result in major problems, similar to that during the early years of the 1980s. Moreover, parts of North Ghana (particularly Upper East Region) are very densely populated, with marked poverty and the long accumulation of worsening environmental conditions. To study the significance of the NGOs supported by Dutch co-funding organisations, the work of Cordaid and ICCO was examined, along with one partner of each – the Catholic diocesan development office of Navrongo/Bolgatanga and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, respectively. In the former case, the focus was on the activities of the Bongo Agro Forestry Programme in the district of Bongo (70.000 inhabitants) and, in the latter case, on the activities of the Presbyterian Agricultural Station in the sub-district of Garu (also around 70.000 inhabitants). The information is based on the results of an *inception workshop*, focus group discussions in four villages, talks with key persons, interviews with individual men, women, youth and the elderly in the four subject villages, two self-study reports, archives and documentation studies, supplemented by regional knowledge from the literature. A detailed country report is currently in preparation.

### **Policy**

#### **1 General policy translated to countries and sector policy**

Cordaid and ICCO in particular have been active in Ghana. Recently, there have been several activities of NOVIB and Hivos. For both Cordaid and ICCO, Ghana can be seen as a structural African partner. It is expected that this will remain the case. Both organisations have long been active in supporting partners, in the field of health care on the one hand (particularly Memisa) and, on the other, in the area of sustainable agriculture. Additionally, there has been particular support for credit programmes and for rural, small-scale income acquisition outside of agriculture. Here, the emphasis has been on North Ghana since the 1980s. In the 1990s (none too early) special attention developed for a gender approach.

In this regard, ICCO concentrated primarily on a single main partner, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG). Our study focused on one of four agricultural stations of the PCG, which is located in the most arid area around Garu in the north-eastern-most part of Ghana. It is an area with an ethnic and religious diverse population, in which the difference between Busanga Muslims and Kusasi Presbyterians is significant.

Although Cordaid's support is more widely spread, support given to the Development Office of the Diocese of Navrongo/Bolgatanga (DNB) has been relatively important. Our study concentrated on one of the main activities of DNB – environmental reconstruction in the most problematical district, Bongo (in terms of poverty and environmental degradation). This district has an ethnically more homogenous population (Frafras) in which the Catholic Church plays an increasing part, but still with a majority of 'traditional worshippers'.

Both donors have long supported an umbrella NGO for support to Christian NGOs in North Ghana, ACDEP. The protracted support given to think-tank-type NGOs such as ACDEP, and to the PCG agricultural stations, coupled to the major development role taken up by the University in Tamale (and its obvious relationship with the NGO sector), as well as to the activities of locally-influential consultancy groups concerned with low, external-input, sustainable agriculture (also with support from the Netherlands, DGIS, ETC) – have transformed it into a pioneering area of sustainable agricultural and environmental development experiments in Africa.

ICCO seems consistent in its continuing concentration on these sectors and areas. There is progressive emphasis on direct combating of poverty at a primary level. Despite some frustration in the late 1990s with inadequate monitoring, assessment and reporting activities at PCG and despite a period of high turnover of personnel, resulting in poor consultation, recently they have got a better grip on the situation. There is new confidence in the ability of the partners (particularly PCG and ACDEP) to continue their pioneering work.

One can see a reversal at Cordaid, with a desire to move away from the traditional operating methods of the Catholic partners and establish closer ties to secular NGOs. There is also a desire to stop direct combating of poverty at a primary level (agriculture and the environment) and concentrate on health care, safety and combating urban poverty for all of Africa. In particular, they would like to support the primary sector in the area of increasing international and regional access to markets. Add to this many years of faulty communication with the traditional partners – and the contours of an approaching tragedy become visible. The Cordaid partners are largely dependent on Cordaid as donor and are insufficiently prepared for a phasing-out process. Conspicuously, for the whole of North Ghana, Dutch support to NGOs is the lifesaver keeping much of the NGO sector afloat, although there are also many smaller NGOs that are entirely or partially financed by foreign donors. World Vision in particular has a prominent presence. In the district of Bongo we found seven active NGOs and 13 in the sub-district of Garu.

## **2 Specific policy for marginal regions**

Within North Ghana, the Upper East Region is the most marginal area in terms of poverty, population density and environmental degradation. From the 1990s, road links to South Ghana were greatly improved. Concerning accessibility and marginality, the Upper West Region is more marginal, but somewhat less in terms of poverty. Cordaid is spread across many subsections throughout the north of Ghana and across quite a few sectors (to put it irreverently, the comments from the field are that Cordaid is “shooting with buckshot”). ICCO is much more specific, concentrating expressly on several problem areas and on several major problems. It is notable that people at ICCO and Cordaid and their supporting partners only talk in negative terms about the very high mobility of the population – the enormous movement to South Ghana and back. In our view, one of the current features of the socio-geographic situation in much of the Sahel is being ignored, or disregarded as undesirable: an extremely mobile population with a ‘*multi-spatial livelihood*’ and with large sectoral and ‘household’ fluidity (‘*diversification*’ and communal living, in which the ‘nuclear families’ do not provide a relevant framework as traditional ‘*extended families*’).

## **Partner policy**

### **3 and 4: Characteristics of the partner pool and trends**

ICCO's partner pool in North Ghana consists chiefly of a large Protestant NGO and several related NGOs. There are long-standing relations with them. As stated previously, Cordaid's pool consists of a larger number of NGOs, which are still mainly Catholic organisations. Cordaid's dissatisfaction with the slow rate of the desired change and Cordaid's own policy debate has resulted in a search for new NGO partners beyond traditional reach.

### **5 Partner analysis and policy**

ICCO's centralised orientation on combating poverty in the Sahel by improving primary production, increased environmental and health care is well reflected in its partner pool in Ghana. From ICCO's perspective, it is not possible to find better partners than the ones it now has. Cordaid's years of concentrating on development offices of Catholic dioceses and their fairly traditional '*catch all*' approach in that country (with much emphasis on health care, primary production and the environment), along with Cordaid's current attempts to reduce direct support to combating poverty (and to do more on institutional advancement and strategic lobbying), and to go in search of new partners outside Catholic ties, will lead to a major confrontation. The new policy deviates radically from established practices. There is poor communication with the 'former partners'. As a result, the Catholic development sector in North Ghana is facing a very uncertain future.

### **6/7 The establishment of partner selection and preservation of own identity**

Partner selection at ICCO is straightforward. One chooses Protestants of its own sort and, with them, related organisations and (Ecumenical) umbrella organisations. In the North Ghanaese context this is seen as a self-evident choice. It is interesting to note that many other Protestant NGOs (there is a jumble of religious denominations) all seem to have their own donor lines and that ICCO is not involved. It is also important to note that, in practice, there are no ties with the Muslim population, which comprises nearly half the inhabitants of the Garu region. At Cordaid there is an identity crisis. They seem to be ashamed of their Catholic partners and their 'old-fashioned' approach to development. They are diligently looking around for secular or Ecumenical partners with greater strategic and intellectual scope. At the very prominent umbrella organisation, ACDEP, both Cordaid and ICCO are involved. This is also the case at the most successful credit organisations for women (BESSFA, which developed from PCG-Garu).

## **Results**

### **8 Outcomes, effects and impact at target group level**

The NGOs receiving support emphatically choose the most problematical areas in terms of poverty, making no further distinctions in these intervention areas between the relatively wealthy and the relatively poor. Via the churches there is some insight into the most grinding cases within the religious community – older widows that get little support from their children, abandoned women with small children – for which there are specific 'charitas-like' support facilities. However, wherever possible, they try to organise the villagers as a whole and, in doing so, also include the more enterprising farmers and traders. One frequently hears that, in effect, everyone in this area is poor. When questioned further, it appears that a good distinction can be made. There is recognition that the idea that 'the poor are invisible' is an obstacle to specific poverty policy. PCG has an additional handicap because there is such express commitment to a Protestant identity. In practice, this makes it difficult to reach the Muslim population. At '*compound*' level, the latter are not poorer, but there are generally more people in each communal unit. This means that the per-capita figures will probably be

lower. Their lower school attendance is an obstacle to integration and improvement of their livelihoods.

Within the subject villages, the NGOs and their activities are prominently present – or were so in the recent past (at village level, both NGOs have a strategy of construction-consolidation-phasing out, which is strictly followed and takes approximately six years). NGOs often have absolute control in ‘their’ villages, to prevent other NGOs from taking up activities there. It seems as though that the entire north of Ghana is covered with a patchwork of NGO attention, in which the nature and prominence of the ‘input’ and the ‘approach’ is very dependent on the NGO that a particular village deals with. In all villages there is some government presence, especially that of the Ministry of Agriculture. Moreover, primary and secondary education is relatively well arranged and also well attended (Ghana has a traditionally high literacy rate; education in North Ghana for parents and pupils is virtually free of charge). In the area of health care, the situation is also relatively good. There is combined government and church care and, more recently, a coherent system. In practice, the villages of North Ghana are not part of the ‘government-free’ area of Africa. The actual work done by civil servants in the villages is however closely related to the links they have with the NGOs (the government provides the expertise; the NGO provides the petrol and the *night-out allowances*). In several village areas that are part of large development programmes by international agencies (such as IFAD), the scale of NGO intervention is suddenly relatively small.

Where PCG is (was) active, many interventions have occurred in all kinds of areas, with impressive carry-over. Fifteen years ago, the Garu region was one of the most decrepit areas of North Ghana, having been hit hard by the Sahel drought. There are many indications that there have been significant changes in countless areas, many of which are seen by the population as substantial improvements. In agriculture (where many PCG interventions take or took place), there has been a breakthrough in pig farms and in irrigated market gardening. There have been improvements in farm management and in the quality of the environment. There has also been a visible rise in prosperity. Although productivity of local grain production is not increasing significantly and is seen as a continuing worry, it is no longer so important as safeguards for livelihood and food in this area. Income is high enough (along with support from *remittances* from the many labour migrants who work in the south of Ghana) to supplement food shortages from elsewhere (especially the rapidly developing ‘grain silo’ – particularly maize – from central Ghana, where many northerners have also migrated).

The visible ‘impact’ of the activities of the Catholic Church’s Bongo Agro Forestry Programme (BAFP) is impressive. Compared to the situation in 1982, there is much more greenery in the area, with many more trees and many farmers, who are using various sustainable agricultural techniques. It should be noted, however, that the situation regarding rainfall is much better now than during the first half of the 1980s (average rainfall during the 1990s was 20-30% better than during the 1980s). Environmental reconstruction has therefore been facilitated by the better environmental conditions. In this area there is some question as to whether this environmental reconstruction will translate into greater prosperity, or whether it prevented a bad situation from getting worse. The Bongo area seems much more traditional in all respects than the area around Garu, making a break-through by the NGO difficult.

In recent years much attention has been given to organising women. According to the women and men, that has resulted in much more independence for women and in a cultural revolution in the way that men and women deal with one another now in public meetings. The fact that

this NGO decided to concentrate on the environmental sector (or was forced to by the donor?) instead of at village level has served as a kind of catalyst of *'local development'* in various areas. This means that, for a time, the villages where this NGO is active had not received any sector attention other than environmental support. Other NGOs opt to work at village level in order to avoid competitors/partners. At villages where the inhabitants believe there is much to be done, this is a major problem. It makes the work of the BAFP that much more difficult.

At the PCG villages, it should be noted, we discovered several remarkable, long-lasting, small-scale relationships between Protestant religious groups and individuals in the Netherlands and 'adopted' village projects. These arose from Dutch people who had been development aid workers in the past, or had been active as ministers. These relationships were autonomous, so much so that the current PCG leadership was amazed. The support is extraordinarily significant and has certainly not done any damage to the village and several individuals. This is the result of 'personal development aid' or 'development aid with a human face', which has been received locally with even greater enthusiasm than the more structural support from the NGO: *'This is real friendship'*. In the Catholic villages there was similar support from Germany, but not from the Netherlands. Neither Cordaid, the diocese nor the project has any policy in this regard. In the ICCO tradition, the relationship with Protestant communities in the Netherlands seems to be more tightly knit – expressing itself in practice as a kind of informal *'twinning'*.

## 9 Relevance

In the *'inception workshop'* that we organised, we asked the gathered group representatives from Bongo District and from Garu sub-District to list all the interventions of the last 20 years and to name the ten most important for combating poverty. The five most highly valued 'top choices' for women and men from Garu and for Bongo are listed below. The underlined programmes are those where the subject NGO had been active. At Garu, notably, there is much appreciation of PCG's main activities – with a marginal note that both women and men agree that, in the planning, there is too little support for (commercial) cattle breeding. It is of a too small scale. At Bongo, the region where the Catholic NGO is active, women but not men mention the planting of trees, one of the main activities of the subject NGO. Nor is there much appreciation of the various other activities of the Catholic NGO. Among men, they would like to see much more support for developing productive water sources for commercial market gardening. However, the NGO is unresponsive, preferring a small-scale approach. More support for education is also desired, but this is not the responsibility of this NGO.

Garú women	Garú men	Bongo women	Bongo men
1 <u>Credit facilities</u>	<u>soil fertility management</u>	Support for girl education	school support programme
2 <u>Gender awareness</u>	<u>credit</u>	Income generation	health/nutrition education
3 <u>livestock improvement</u>	<u>empowerment</u>	<u>tree planting</u>	water and sanitation
4 literacy programmes	<u>livestock improvement</u>	health and nutrition education	credit
5 <u>capacity building for access to banks</u>	<u>dry-season (irrigated) gardening</u>	Literacy programmes	dams and wells

## 10 Results at other levels

Ghana is preparing for the implementation of extensive decentralisation, which will include several government programmes aimed at reducing poverty (related to the *Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers*) to be decentralised at district level. NGOs have high expectations about the opportunities that this will create. In all villages where the two NGOs are or have been active, there has been substantial, firmly-rooted group education partly of women and partly of men and women together. The expertise formed in managing groups and in mobilising support (within the villages themselves and at higher administrative levels) has resulted in substantial social capital. Twenty years ago there was very little that compared to this. Moreover, many leaders from regional level stem from the circles of people trained by the NGOs. In our estimate, the quality of the very vocal NGO community in North Ghana is high. It has succeeded in bringing about intensive mutual cooperation and getting themselves heard at government level and by the donors. The gap between the Muslim and often Christian-inspired NGO world of North Ghana is somewhat worrisome in a strategic-political sense. Another fact worth mentioning is that the rapidly growing 'Pentecostal' movement seems to be staying aloof from the 'development debate'. It would not surprise us if the Pentecostal movement should attract socially marginal groups in particular. The Presbyterians we studied, on the other hand, seem to have an almost 'Weberian' drive, seeing themselves as the chosen ones. There is a chance that social contrasts could increasingly manifest themselves in North Ghana along ethnic-religious lines (as could be seen in the last few years). This, combined with the fact that many leaders trained by the Christian NGOs are now also prominently present in district politics and the development bureaucracy, could lead to problems. It would be to the credit of the NGOs if they paid more attention to bridging the inter-religious – and therefore inter-ethnic – differences. In practice, however, that would be at odds with their identity and with the competition around religious identity. The Catholics in particular do not seem to care about religious boundaries. In the villages where they are active, the benefits extend to a larger group than just Catholics, but the individual effects are modest (BASF: socially broad, sectorally narrow, but with less depth vis-à-vis PCG – socially narrow, sectorally broad and far-reaching).

### **11 Organisational reinforcement**

A substantial organisational structure has been set up in the area of the subject NGOs. At village level there are many new organisational structures involving large numbers of people. At district level, they are fairly well prepared for implementation of decentralisation. The executive formed by the NGOs will also play a major role here. The close ties among the NGOs active in North Ghana and the strategically important role played by ACDEP means that the NGO sector is now visible at national and donor level. The fact that North Ghana is substantially poorer and that there are relatively more poor people in absolute terms than in the south gives the North Ghanese NGO sector an important role in the national poverty debate in Ghana. However, there are fears that the various embassies are particularly focused on what they see in the vicinity of Accra and Kumasi, and that North Ghana will remain outside their field of vision. North Ghanese NGOs have not yet reached the point that they can effectively undertake lobbying activities in Accra.

### **12 Sustainability**

Social changes in Ghana (much better social organisational capabilities, cultural changes concerning the role and status of women) are probably sustainable and could be further consolidated if decentralisation really results in greater development-policy opportunities at local, district and village levels. Major improvements in the environmental situation also seem sustainable, although there are local fears for a repetition of the disastrous situation during the

early 1980s. People are now much better prepared for this. The economic diversity of income sources is much larger than 20 years ago. The scale of migration to the south is much larger and related financial support is probably substantial. The fact that an extensive system of small-scale credit grants is in place could also mean that there is a larger buffer capacity for bad times. The rapid growth of commercial interests in South Ghana (tomatoes, onions, fruit, rice, pigs and other livestock, along with such things as soap) is of course also related to the economic growth that has taken place in South Ghana over the last 10 years, and the rapidly growing urban demand for agricultural products. If this growth and demand should decline, it would obviously have repercussions in North Ghana. In the north there is a risk that suppressed ethnic-religious tensions could further rise, which could result in the destruction of existing physical capital and a reversal of confidence (for which there is broad support) that everything will gradually improve.

### **13 Declaration**

Compared to many other areas in Africa (and in the Sahel), the ‘impact’ of support offered by ICCO and Cordaid to the subject NGOs in Ghana, Burkina Faso and Mali is large and visible. Many of the social changes during the last decade identified by the population are ‘attributable’ to the activities undertaken by the NGOs with CFO support. The attribution problem here is less troublesome than elsewhere, since Dutch donor support is so dominant in the region or in the intervention villages and since, for the most part, the NGOs rely on NOVIB, Cordaid and ICCO for their financial support. (Temporary) exceptions to this are ADRK and ODE, which ‘only’ get a third of their budgets from ICCO, while the other outside ‘interventionists’ are less prominent. In this regard, it should be noted that PCG’s approach in Ghana has been much more vigorous than that of DNB/BAFP. Also, in the eyes of the inhabitants, it played a key role in the changes ascertained by them. The success of the activities of the supported NGOs was due in no small part to a relatively good period in the cycle of climate fluctuations and by the fact that both the Burkinabé and the Ghanaese economies and political confidence managed to climb out of the deep abyss of the 1970s and 1980s, together with the last 15 years of major progress. Economic growth in the south of Ghana, along with rapid urbanisation in that area, also afforded many opportunities in the north of the country and for much of Burkina Faso. The activities of the NGO sector managed to take advantage of this – combined with much better opportunities to transport products to the south through construction of a good paved road, which connects the central northern region with Ouagadougou, and that city with Upper East in the north of Ghana and with the south of Ghana. The rapid growth of a commercial economy was also made possible by expansion of a credit sector supported by NGOs, in which credit facilities contributed strongly to *cash flow*, which furthers trade. The question that needs to be asked is whether the economic success could have been even greater if the NGOs (and their donors) had dared to work on a larger scale and to operate more intrepidly in Ghana or in Burkina Faso, with greater realisation of the repercussions (positive and negative) of the economic world of liberalisation and globalisation. From the perspective of the population, more investment in physical infrastructure (dams, irrigation pumps, roads) could have resulted in even faster expansion – but NGOs constantly backed away from this. Naturally, many of these investments are the responsibility of the government, which wants to attract economic activity to a region. That has always been part of the development dialogue in French West Africa. However, it could also have led to a better private-public partnership with the Ghanaese and Burkinabé authorities, as has come about in the meantime in the health-care sector. With slightly more daring, the donors and supported NGOs could make better use of such

partnerships in the coming decentralisation – in which case, the donors would have to operate on a larger scale.

One comment is in order. Recent official studies in North Ghana into the poverty situation provide a humiliating picture. For the Upper East Region they found that there was massive, increased poverty. In regional discussions, the findings were viewed with disbelief and considerable scepticism. Many NGO leaders believe that there is a crude overestimation of the poverty situation and a crude underestimation of the achievements. The extremely faulty data used at macro level makes political manipulation of data relatively simple. The NGO sector itself is confronted with an ongoing dilemma: harping at a very bad situation could result in more support, but the denial of improvements achieved can undermine confidence in the effectiveness of ‘aid’. Everyone now openly admits that the NGO sector as a whole has failed in setting up its own ‘development monitoring system’. With support particularly from ICCO, much work was done in this area during the last two years. However, little use of this could be made for this study.

## **Added Value of the CFO Channel**

### **14 CFO contributions to the outcomes**

There seems to be a major difference between the way in which Cordaid and ICCO have operated in recent years in relations with their partners in North Ghana. In this regard, it is notable how important individuals are, which add a human face to the relationship, and how problematical the lack of continuity and institutional memory can be. Both ICCO and Cordaid seem to have operated inadequately with respect to Ghana over the last 10 years. Only at ICCO can it be said that they are ‘out of the crisis’. According to spokespersons of the subject NGOs, support from ICCO (and a little from Cordaid) was extremely important in several areas. This specifically referred to the implementation of a gender policy, the setting up of a better quality-assurance policy and a more strategic reflection concerning the potential investment guidelines. In this regard, it is interesting to note how important the intermediary organisations are: ACDEP in particular, but also the support offered from the Netherlands by I/C Consult. It is also remarkable how important it now seems to be that a sizeable ‘development’ structure has been established. Individuals from North Ghana who have worked for NGOs and who did consulting work for them seem to have all kinds of links to the ‘development lobby’. This lobby encompasses the NGO sector, local universities and local authorities. Considering the relative importance of the NGO sector in bringing about innovations in agricultural, environmental and organisational areas, it is defensible that the NGO sector was of crucial importance for rural development. Its broad social scope and reach also contributed to continued combating of poverty, reaching a large, relatively poor group. The fact that the development activities of PCG and DNB are linked to churches in the subject villages which are socially important institutions, furthers the carry-over effect, the sustainability and breadth of activities. That particularly seems to be the case at PCG. The drawback is that groups that are socially isolated from these churches benefit less. The Muslims of Garu are one example and the isolated traditional spiritual leaders another.

### **15 Selection and outcomes**

It has been stated that North Ghana seems to display a patchwork of NGO activities, particularly with one NGO active in each village. Depending on the strength of the NGO, its activities and particularly the donor support they manage to acquire, there will be greater input or output, effects and impact. In our study we came across interesting differences between the ICCO-supported PCG, with its solid approach and large local significance – and the much

more modest, limited approach taken by the Cordaid-supported DNB/BAFP. The fact that Northeast Ghana was ‘opened up’ the last decade and fully benefited from the economic ‘boom’ offers a somewhat one-sided, perhaps optimistic view. If this study had been conducted in more isolated sections of Northwest Ghana, or in the thinly populated and barely accessible Northern Region, the NGO activities there would probably have been smaller in scope and people would not have benefited from the relatively favourable conditions.

### **16 Added value of the CFO channel**

The existence of a CFO channel has led to broad, effective support in North Ghana and Burkina Faso to the main religious development organisations active in the area. It has also resulted in a large number of individuals that, thanks to CFO support, managed to expand to a ‘development staff pool’, which is politically and strategically important at higher pay-scale levels and at other organisations. Support from the CFOs (especially from ICCO and NOVIB) for quality improvement has been important for the work of the NGO sector in North Ghana and Burkina Faso. The existence of a broad civil society in both research regions would not have been possible without CFO support. For too long, the NGO sector has trusted blindly in the long-lasting continuation of the ties with NOVIB, ICCO and Cordaid and the financial independence that has long been the case – gives cause for concern, certainly in view of the drifting policy of Cordaid (a good share of the ‘development intelligentsia’ depends entirely on the CFOs for their salaries).

Of course, support to the NGO sector could also come from embassies or country offices of international organisations and, to some extent, this does take place in Ghana and certainly in Burkina Faso. The question is whether this could be done with the same commitment and long duration as was the case with ICCO and, every now and then, with Cordaid. However, the added value of the CFO channel (in terms of commitment and long duration) could have been better exploited than was the case, and the CFO sector should have been more successful in building bridges between small-scale capacity structures there and small-scale involvement by the Dutch people. The experiences in one of the PCG villages in Ghana, for example, with this ‘development aid with a human face’ show this effect, but are diametrically opposed to the bureaucratic and stand-offish method of ‘development’, of the kind employed by the large bilateral and multilateral donors.

### **17 Comparison with the Andes study**

The ‘impact’ of the NGO’s work in North Ghana, Burkina Faso and Mali is substantially larger and better demonstrable than the findings of the Andes study reveal. The activities of the NGOs in these regions are very practical and seldom imbedded in the Great Debate about the future of the area or of the ‘peasantry’. The major social changes in the Sahel (particularly the spatial mobility and the break-through of commercialisation) still play a too minor role in the strategic discussions of NGOs. For the former, mobility is being ignored, partly because it is seen as an undesired development (which is understandable from the standpoint of a religious ‘recruiting strategy’: fluid, mobile people easily slip away from sedentary local frameworks). For the second factor, commercialisation, there is interest, but many do not dare to accept the challenge it offers. To do so, they would have to think on a larger scale and be willing to take the lead in large-scale public-private partnerships. Nor do the traditional donors, ICCO and Cordaid, seem to want to follow this path, with the exception of the health-care sector. Compared to the Andes study, attention given to cultural identity is less prominent. Underground – and, for a part, already surging to the surface – the strategic use of identity (religious and ethnic) by politically-motivated manipulators in North Ghana is becoming a problem that receives too little attention. The experiences in Nigeria, for example,

are too quickly pushed aside with 'it won't happen to us'. What is standing in the way of religiously-inspired NGOs in general – also in other countries – is that they are pre-eminently based on cultural identity, which in many cases links religious choices to ethnic specificity. When the religious frameworks became localised (the leadership is now localised nearly everywhere, with virtually no 'white' contributions anymore), the local identity received extra emphasis (if only because of the 'ethnic' language used in many church services and meetings). In that regard, Cordaid understands that there is more support needed for NGOs that concentrate on human rights and peace activities (including preventive activities). The progress that has resulted in North Ghana is precarious. It can easily be undermined (with much of the accumulated capital being destroyed again) if there should be another explosion of violence based on Muslims versus Christians and on ethnic sentiments. The fleshing out of the coming decentralisation will be of great importance. The North Ghanese NGOs have prepared the people there well and their executives could play a prominent role. However, much will depend on the way in which decentralisation leads to local exclusion of local minority groups.