

will simplify matters for the OAU and other African NGOs in terms of who they should approach for assistance. Contact people are also very important in terms of the *coordination* of donor assets. For example, it was recently proposed that the Secretariat of the European Union perform this information management role for the international donor community, passing information on to all of the national contact people. Similarly, the OAU now has conflict prevention mechanism contact points in each member state, which provides the potential for more directed dissemination of information throughout Africa. In Canada, the Peacebuilding Contact Group acts in this capacity, and has the potential to improve the information flow on Canadian policy and project initiatives throughout Africa. Another important issue will be the *logistical support* required for the actual implementation of programs and activities. The multiplicity of donors requires some means of coordination so that the effectiveness of contributions is maximised while avoiding duplication of services.

In this process of determining the shape of Canadian participation, certain questions should also be considered. One of these concerns whether the issues being addressed are those which are most *relevant to practitioners*. For example, there has been a lot of debate so far in the OAU consultation process over the defining of "civil society", and the literature in the North defines the term quite differently from the way African NGOs understand it. "Early warning" is another concept which will require further clarification, particularly with regard to determining reliable indicators. In fact, some participants doubted whether it is possible to use generic indicators without region- and area-specific knowledge and *analysis* as a basis for effective early warning. Such issues must be framed in coherent operational terms that make sense to those responsible for policy implementation. It was argued that such analyses must be done independently of operational work in conflicts, and that the best way to do this is to fund networks of academics, NGOs, and policy-makers that are based on regional centres of field expertise.

Another question that must be addressed is the extent to which assistance will be *timely* and *effective*. Projects designed outside of Africa tend to be 1) based on perceived needs rather than being responsive to priorities determined by Africans; and 2) overtaken by rapidly changing events inside Africa before they are even implemented. In contrast, the recent OAU conference on peacebuilding was organised completely within Africa, without any non-African organisational assistance. This is part of a discernable trend in the past year towards leadership from within Africa, in part due to the availability of South African resources.