

**Title:** What are the comparative advantages of international non-governmental organisations engaged in the alleviation of poverty in rural Africa?

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**Abstract:**

This study examines international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with specific reference to their role in poverty alleviation in the rural areas of Africa. By exploring the unique properties of NGOs, in particular their relationship with their beneficiaries and their organisational structure, the veracity of the generally held view that they are a more suitable vehicle for rural development than the African State will be tested. The relative strength of the NGO and State sectors will be investigated, their attitudes and approaches to rural development will be considered, as will the relationship between them. The conclusion will be that NGOs will only take advantage of their singular properties when they become fully aware of their limitations. The contention is that they are unable to achieve significant impact with their project work precisely because of the characteristics that define them, and to improve the scale of their results they will need to look for alternative strategies. These strategies, it will be argued, will necessarily be of a more political nature; using the respect they have gained through their small-scale project work, they will challenge governments and the international institutions to create an environment more conducive to rural development.