Factors That Influence The Contribution Of Civil Society Organizations To Public Policy Formulation The Case Of Uganda

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The paper seeks to explore the factors that determine the level and nature of civil society engagement in the public policy formulation with specific reference to Uganda. It explores the level and nature of engagements as well as the constraints that limit effective participation of civil society in the process.

The paper provides the results of a scooping study undertaken by the author and the methodology used as well as areas that need further study to ensure active and productive engagement of the two partners in this important process.

Civil society and particularly NGOs in Uganda are relatively young. Majority of them have a narrow social base and thin geographical coverage. They depend mainly on donor funds from their international partners. They are mainly urban based with a minimal presence in the countryside.

The study undertook to identify the current strengths and weaknesses as regards the relationship between civil society organizations and the state in particular as regards the public policy formulation processes in Uganda. The methodology of data collection was Marjory qualitative with method including report reviews of similar studies undertaken, structured interviews, and focused group discussions and case studies. The target respondents included among others civil society leaders, government officials, civil society leaders and some opinion leaders like the members of the academia.

The findings indicated among others that the civil-society organizations in Uganda are not homogeneous in terms of interest methods and scope and the fore not easy to generalize when it comes to the findings.

However, the general trends pointed to the following:

- That there is a growing trend where government involves civil society organizations in the policy formulation process.
- The process of selection is random and the capacity of them to influence policy is limited.
- That they are mostly involved in implementation not advocacy let alone governance where policy formulation is located.
- The study found that despite this CSOs are increasingly getting involved in governance issues especially electoral monitoring as well as budgeting and expenditure tracking of government programs.
- The political space is improving for CSO participation in policy processes though a lot is desired such as the commitment to full democracy and tolerance of dissenting views which is critical to this engagement process.
- The relationship is constantly evolving and is one of both collaboration and conflict. Although allowed to participate they are sometimes perceived as competitors with government and also at worst as agents of foreign interests in the engagement process.
- Luck of courage to confront the state especially within the no-go areas.
- Luck of unity of purpose on the part of the civil society organizations.
- Luck of sufficient legitimacy on the part of civil society organizations to be able to enlist attention from government mainly due to dependence on foreign funding and limited presence in the countryside.
- Limited lobbying and advocacy skills among the civil society organizations.

The study recommends among others:

- Capacity building in the areas of lobbying and advocacy, improved networking and collaboration among civil society organizations.
- Greater efforts to mobilize the locals into the ranks of civil society organizations and confidence building between these otherwise important actors in the public policy discourse.

The study recommends further research into the causes of latent fear between the two sides and ways of creating a true partnership for the good.
of the citizens of Uganda who are the target beneficiaries of the efforts on either side of the perceived divide