

Publications



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The International Society for Third-Sector Research (ISTR) is pleased to present the second in a series of occasional reports. The report is based on the research papers prepared for the inaugural meeting of the ISTR African Research Network (Johannesburg, South Africa, December, 1997) which focused on Civil Society in Africa. This report reflects the opinions and views of the author, and not necessarily those of the Society.

**Globalisation, Marginalization and
the Retreat of the State of Africa:
The Role of Civil Society in the Pursuit of
Democratic Governance, Socio-Economic Development and Regional Integration**

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This paper is based on the inputs made to the first African ISTR workshop held in South Africa from 4-6 December 1997, under the theme: "Development and Democracy in a Globalising World: The Role of Civil Society in Africa." The various inputs, in the form of written papers, presentations and discussion, addressed the impact of globalisation on the African continent, in particular the marginalisation of people (and the resultant community/'ethnic' fragmentation, and rise of religious and other fundamentalism), and the retreat or partial collapse of the nation-state in many areas. These challenges have led to the emergence of a variety of civil society formations in different parts of Africa, which have attempted to strengthen democratic governance within their countries, reduce poverty through a range of development and capacity-building initiatives, and re-unite people through various cross ethnic, cross-national initiatives.

The paper draws on the insights of these inputs, in order to critically analyse the meaning of 'civil society' to the predominantly rural African continent--including the 'urban bias' that is allegedly embedded in the concept, and the dependence of much of civil society on foreign donors for survival. Given the threats and opportunities posed by globalisation, what role has civil society--in particular the NGO and labour movements-- played in Africa during the past two decades? In the context of a retreating or collapsing state, what role can civil society play in reconstituting the state, in order to build democratic forms of governance in all spheres of society, including that of socio-economic development?

The paper will also consider aspects of the South African experience, and seek to draw lessons for the rest of the continent. Particular attention will be given to the discourse and organisation of the NGO sector, the labour movement, and the various multi-partite forums that have emerged over the past few years to institutionalise civil society participation in policy formulation under the new democratic government.

**WHAT IS CIVIL SOCIETY?
An Urban Concept?**

Professor Mahmood Mamdani, a noted Ugandan scholar, opened the workshop with a thought-provoking interrogation of the notion of civil society and its applicability to Africa. Much of Africa is still predominantly rural. The notion of 'civil society,' however, is embedded in an urban understanding of 'civilised' society, which emerged within the context of the modern state in Europe. This state sought to centralise all the means of violence, such that

conflicts, through a discourse of rights, could now be resolved without having to resort to violence. However, noted Mamdani, these rights were never universal, as they applied to exclusive groups within the city. Non-city people were regarded as the enemy, and much of this continues today outside the now predominantly urban Europe.

In the colonised world, said Mamdani, the enemy became the rural natives, through a new racist discourse which denied the humanity of the native. Some, however, managed to avoid complete exclusion. In Francophone colonies, where direct rule occurred, a new indigenous urban elite emerged, and they were assimilated into the civilised urban elite. In Anglophone colonies, where indirect rule predominated, this was less so, although a significant class of 'civilised natives' emerged.

The democratic rights of modern urban society, argued Mamdani, did not apply to the rural people who fell under customary law, and hence the power of 'hereditary chiefs.' These chiefs were, in the main, imposed on the people by the colonial powers, with few checks and balances. A complex, dynamic system of hereditary rule was frozen into a single set of customs, and robbed of their democratic content, in the interests of stable colonial rule.

Today, asserted Mamdani, the urban elites rule post-colonial Africa, either in government, in opposition or in the economy (as a comprador bourgeoisie). Their concerns and aspirations are by and large locked into that of urban elites in the 'mother country,' and rarely with the marginalised rural poor. Traditional leaders still rule in rural areas, largely in opposition to democratisation.

For Mamdani, then, 'civil society' is the terrain of the urban elite, and while not in itself a useless concept, it is insufficient to truly capture the complexity of rural and urban Africa. It implies a model of 'civilisation' that was developed in Western Europe, which the intellectuals of Africa have embraced completely, such that their self-image is taken directly from colonialism. He expressed his belief that the notion of 'civil society' increased in popularity during the late 1980s' East European uprisings, and has been uncritically adopted in the developing world.

Mamdani concluded by posing the following questions: Can the notion of 'civil society' address the complex question of the transformation of customary power? Is it not being used to undermine the role of the state, in a context where the state (which has deracialised more than society, where western elites, through the transnational corporations, still dominate the economy) is the only institution capable of championing justice? Is the key question then not the retreat of the state, and the promotion of 'civil society,' but the reform of the state, such that power is democratically organised to promote democratic rights, as well as socio-economic development?

A Contested Terrain

This challenge to the notion of 'civil society' in Africa was taken up by Steven Friedman, a South African policy analyst. Friedman argued that there is no one definition of civil society, and put forward a restricted notion that is tied very firmly to the existence of democracy (a key element of which is the existence of regular, free elections). Thus, in a developed democracy, civil society exists as a terrain of contestation, where specific interests have the right to organize and debate public policy. Civil society, argued Friedman, is always independent of the state, although it continually interacts with the state. While it seeks to influence the state, it does not seek to take over the state, as it concedes that ultimately decisions on public policy are the preserve of democratic governments. In other words, civil society-state relations are simultaneously tension-ridden and complementary.

Friedman debunked the notion of 'civil society' as a sphere of "unqualified good," because it misunderstands the essence of civil society, which is a terrain of contestation. This implies that it is composed of myriad organisations from the far right to the far left, efficient and inefficient, unaccountable and accountable, subversive and patriotic, representatives of the privileged and under-privileged. However, civil society holds government accountable to a range of interests through these various organisations. The more democratic the state (which, I would argue, implies a high degree of social equality), the more likely that all interests will be organised. In this situation, civil society holds

government accountable to the entire citizenry, as it obliges it to engage with people of different allegiances and cross-cutting loyalties.

Friedman also considered the notion of a 'global civil society,' which is constituted by, amongst other things, NGO networks and business alliances across the globe. However, this is still in embryonic form, particularly because there is no equivalent 'global state.' Thus, global civil society impacts primarily on individual states. Nevertheless, it must be noted that global institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, United Nations (UN), and World Trade Organisation (WTO) are, in many ways, embryonic forms of a 'global state,' and 'global civil society' is beginning to engage directly with them.

Friedman's understanding of civil society, then, is deliberately urban, in that it is located within a modernist conception of democracy that is, in the end, primarily an urban phenomenon. Thus, where there is no democracy, there is no civil society. This harmonizes with Mamdani's view, because he does not see the value of the notion of 'civil society' in much of rural Africa, which is effectively under hereditary rule and customary law. Friedman's definition would also exclude much of urban Africa, as most African states do not have regular, free elections, and are hence, according to Friedman, not democratic.

Economic, Political and Civil Society

Friedman's insistence on defining civil society in relation to the state is useful. Civil society is a nebulous concept and difficult to define precisely. For classical liberals, civil society is primarily about the private economic sector, and indeed the concept arose with the rise of capitalism out of feudalism (when society was dominated by the aristocratic state). Private enterprise then became the liberating force that opened up other spheres of private organisation. However, modern society has developed in such a complex manner, and the capitalist state has developed such intricate synergies with the capitalist class (or business sector), that it is necessary to make a conceptual distinction between the corporate profit-making sector, with its peculiar dynamics, and the non-profit sector, which has an entirely different dynamic of its own. Thus, the former has been called 'economic society,' while the latter 'civil society' or the 'third sector'--the sphere of everyday associational life, composed of ordinary citizens who do not have their hands on the levers of power (political and economic).

It is also useful to make a separation between 'civil society' and 'political society.' While political parties are not profit-oriented, in a democracy they usually operate within the structures of parliament. Again, Friedman's definition is retained--they seek political power, whereas civil society seeks to influence public policy, but not take direct power itself (although sections of civil society may ally themselves to one or other political party). But because all political parties do not participate in government, or have a direct role in the administration of government, it is useful to separate 'political society' (the representative arm) from 'the state' (the executive and administrative arm).

It is also useful to think of civil society as the organised expression of interests. Thus, individuals and families (unless organised into an NGO or business or political party) constitute a separate, private sphere. Civil society is composed of organisations that primarily represent their members or constituencies' interests, and are thus ideally independent of government, private capital and political parties.

A working definition of 'civil society' is that space or terrain of democratic contestation and mobilisation outside the state, economy and parliament. In reality, there is a great deal of overlap, and such neat distinctions may not be possible.

For example, a trade union operates at the workplace and can be located primarily within economic society. However, those trade unions which see their role as not only shop-floor collective bargaining, but as a champion of working class interests in other spheres (education, housing, etc.), are also part of civil society. If a trade union is closely tied to the governing party, and operates primarily as a 'transmission belt' of instruction from government to

workers, then that union also forms part of the state. If it decides, as a union, to fight elections, then it becomes part of political society.

Similarly, an association representing informal traders is both part of economic society (because they trade to make a profit) and civil society (their profit margins are so small that they remain part of the powerless, underprivileged sector). NGOs that receive government grants, and work primarily for the state, could be called quasi-NGOs, and could be both part of the state and of civil society (depending on their degree of independence from the state).

Degrees of Democracy

One objection to Friedman's restricted definition of civil society--i.e., that it exists only in the context of a democratic state--is that it would exclude all those organisations, from residents groups to sports clubs, which came together under the United Democratic Front (UDF) to fight apartheid during the 1980s. These organisations were independent of the state and represented specific interests in society. The apartheid state was not democratic, but it was also not totalitarian, in that it held regular, free elections for those classified 'white.' It allowed space for independent organisation within the white community and gradually, under pressure, to an increasing range of interests in the black community.

Friedman's definition, however, can easily be extended to include partially democratic societies in rural and urban Africa, with a flexible understanding of degrees of 'democracy.'

At the one extreme we have totalitarianism, where the state takes complete control over all aspects of social life. There is no privately organised sphere outside the family. The Soviet Union under Stalin is a good example. In this social formation, there is no civil society.

At the other extreme is the idealised situation of complete democracy. Here all citizens have equal access to the means of communication and all interest groups can engage fully with government in the formulation of public policy. This presupposes a society of minimal social inequality and maximum tolerance of diversity and difference. There is a fine balance between a strong state and a strong civil society. The state is sufficiently strong to protect individual liberties and ensure social equality and the 'national good,' while civil society is sufficiently strong to ensure maximum participation of citizens in public life and maximum accountability of government to citizens between elections. While no country currently embodies this ideal, the Scandinavian countries perhaps come the closest.

Most countries today fall in between these two poles. Some countries may hold regular, free elections, but they severely restrict citizen participation between elections (e.g., Malaysia, where trade unions are repressed). Others may not hold multi-party elections, but there is a high degree of civil participation (e.g., Uganda).

Thus, in semi-totalitarian societies, where there is little or no political democracy, but there is space for substantial contestation within society, one can talk of the existence of a partial or embryonic civil society.

In semi-democratic societies, where formal democracy exists, but there is a high degree of social inequality, and consequently unequal access to the means of communication, there is a constrained civil society. The privileged will have a powerful voice, and will be self-financed. The poor, however, will be dependent on external resources, whether it be through government grants, local businesses or foreign donors. Their voice is consequently constrained.

A fully developed civil society in a full democracy will have self-funded organisations that can truly represent the interests and aspirations of their constituencies. This ideal has not been attained in the advanced democracies of northern Europe, and is far removed from the realities of the developing world, especially African countries.

Mamdani's concerns, then, may be catered for within this nuanced conceptualisation of 'civil society,' which is consciously extended to rural societies. Rural NGOs and social movements have emerged all over the world in recent years, particularly to address environmental issues, but also issues concerning women, housing, health, etc. Where these organisations exist, they inevitably link up with urban-based counterparts, which can channel their concerns to the state. The rural-urban divide thus becomes more blurred.

However, in Africa, it must be acknowledged that independent organisation within rural communities, which often act as a counter-weight to the power of local chiefs, is limited. Many rural societies are still under the sway of hereditary rule. However, the extended version of Friedman's definition can still hold--where there is no democracy, or space for democratic organisation in particular rural communities, but democratic contestation in urban areas, then there is a partial or embryonic civil society within that particular country.

Before considering the role of civil society in Africa, it is necessary to understand the context within which civil society is being shaped, namely globalisation and its antecedents, colonialism and imperialism.

GLOBALISATION, MARGINALISATION AND THE RETREAT OF THE STATE

'Globalisation' is fashionably used to describe the current phase of capitalist development, where the globe is rapidly becoming one 'free' market, partially through the formation of regional trading blocs, but increasingly across the globe. The driving force is finance capital, which moves rapidly from one part of the world to another. This has been made possible by the explosive strides in technology--particularly in communications and information--since the computer chip revolution in the 1960s.

Nation-states are under enormous pressure to conform to the dictates of 'global competition.' This takes the form of providing an attractive climate for investment (which often means lowering corporate taxes and labour and environmental standards) and, given the decline in protectionism, becoming more 'competitive,' which acts as a downward pressure on wages and standards. The social wage (i.e., state benefits) is also under pressure, and all welfare states have been progressively cutting back, given reduced per capita tax revenues.

Globalisation, however, is not just a post-60's phenomenon. It has its roots in colonialism. Earlier, pre-capitalist forms of colonisation in different ways integrated specific geographical spaces under one dominant power. The rise of modern capitalism gave colonialism a new meaning. The Spanish and Portuguese conquests in the Americas, Asia and parts of Africa during the 14th century came with the rise of merchant capitalism in Europe. The industrial revolution in England, however, brought the need for cheap labour, new markets for manufactured goods, and natural resources (food and minerals) to supply the new industries, and the new tastes of the emerging working and middle classes in western Europe. This led to the scramble for Africa, and the intensification of colonialism in other parts of the world.

Whole economies and societies were disrupted and reshaped to suit the needs of western capitalism. The legacies of these distorted economies persist today, particularly in Africa. These economies are so dependent on the former mother countries that they find it extremely difficult to break out of the spiral of continuous aid. Such aid, of course, comes at an enormous cost, because the developed countries, through privileged access to raw materials and markets, eventually take out much more than they put in. The national sovereignty of the new post-independence regimes has thus always been fragile, and this has intensified under globalisation.

Neo-liberalism

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the new right assumed power in Britain (under Margaret Thatcher) and the USA (under Ronald Reagan) to promote a return to 19th century liberal economic practices. This has been called neo-liberalism, and it is characterised by an onslaught on the welfare state and mixed economy (which in varying degrees

had become the dominant economic practice since the First World War). Promoted by American economist Milton Friedman, neo-liberalism sought to break down barriers to free trade, reduce state intervention in the economy, reduce state expenditure (including on the social wage), and basically free up the economy for 'global competition' and global production, dominated by US, European and Japanese-based transnational corporations.

This ideology was consciously spread to the developing world--in particular Latin America and Africa--by the US-dominated International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank, as part of their 'conditionalities' for loans. These countries were heavily indebted, after a 1970s lending spree by the World Bank when interest rates were relatively low and the Bank needed to off-load excess capital. However, during the 1980s, interest rates, under neo-liberalism, had rocketed upwards. The debt burden of Latin America and Africa spiraled out of control, such that interest payments alone were crippling, and far outweighed whatever aid was coming into these countries. Indeed, there was a net outflow of capital from the developing world to the developed world.

The IMF and World Bank, then, had a big stick to wield. If African countries were to receive more loans to rebuild their economies, they had to subscribe to the uniform, one-size-fits-all structural adjustment programme (SAP) of the IMF/World Bank. The SAP was but an extension of neo-liberalism to the developing world, and included a demand that state expenditure (read health education and whatever meagre welfare expenditure existed) needed to be cut drastically. These economies had to be opened up to transnational corporations and geared towards their 'comparative advantages' (meaning that, for most African countries, investment should focus on tourism, agriculture and mining, and not manufacturing, which is the comparative advantage of the developed world).

Needless to say, dependency on the developed world increased, as they tightened their control over high-end manufacturing, leaving Africa to sink deeper into its status as a playground for the rich, and as a supplier of cheap raw materials and cheap labour. A classical neo-colonial trap.

The demise of the Soviet Union and its east European satellites accelerated the spread of neo-liberalism as the 'only' development model during the 1990s. However, widespread evidence of the devastation caused by SAPs, and the increased recognition of the need to combine it with democratic governance, which includes the development of civil society, has forced a shift in policy. This is largely due to the sustained campaigns of NGOs and social movements throughout the world. The World Bank and IMF now promote 'democratisation' alongside a toned down neo-liberalism (in the sense that they recognise the necessity of the state to invest in human capital, including education and health care). There is increased recognition that everything cannot be left to market forces--the mantra of the 1980s.

Nevertheless, transnational corporations are maintaining their pressure on governments to allow them even greater mobility and power across the globe. The latest challenge lies in the Multi-lateral Agreement on Investments (MAI), which has been debated in the Organisation of Economic Development and Cooperation (OECD), the rich countries' club. Stiff opposition from civil society organisations and certain governments to its provisions, which have severe implications for the sovereignty of nation-states, has deferred debate to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Countries like India and, of late, South Africa have objected to what seems to be an attempt, in the words of Noam Chomsky, to turn developing countries into "wholly-owned subsidiaries" of the transnational corporations (Mail and Guardian, May 1997).

The problems of Africa, then, cannot be viewed in isolation from the bigger picture of colonialism, imperialism and globalisation. While internal factors--such as state patronage, undeveloped human resources, corruption, and 'ethnic' rivalry, etc.--have played their part in keeping much of Africa underdeveloped, these factors have interacted with and been shaped by powerful external factors that have been, and arguably still are, determining.

Marginalisation, Fragmentation and Fundamentalism

Nevertheless, Structural Adjustment Programmes were imposed on countries in Africa (and Latin America) that were, in many instances, badly run, with corrupt dictators and "patrimonial autocracies" (see Muchie). These dictators were usually kept in power by the USA and, to a lesser extent, by the former Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War. Mineral-rich countries like Nigeria and Zaire were kleptocracies, where new post-colonial elites in the military and the bureaucracy regarded the national economy as their private domain, in partnership with transnational corporations behind the scenes, out of reach of the people.

However, other countries, under the rule of former Marxists, voluntarily pursued neo-liberal macro-economic policies. The most notable are Ghana under Jerry Rawlings and Uganda under Yoweri Museveni. These countries have shown impressive growth rates, and indeed Africa as a whole has grown impressively in recent years. But has this translated into improved living standards for ordinary people? Evidence thus far suggests not. High 'growth' does not necessarily equal high development, in the holistic sense of the latter. As South Africa is currently showing, growth in itself does not create jobs. The phenomenon of jobless growth is an international one, given the rise in labour-saving technology. Alongside this is the unprecedented accumulation of wealth in fewer and fewer hands. While the rich get richer, and a few locals are drawn into the fruits of globalisation, there is evidence of increased marginalisation of the majority of the people throughout the world.

Rural communities throughout Africa face pressures similar to their counterparts in Latin America and Asia, where governments have reduced tariff barriers, thus allowing the importation of cheaper food produced with the aid of new radiation technology in the developed countries. The lack of protection has made the nurturing of domestic industries--a prerequisite for the historical development of developed countries--almost impossible. Whole economies in Africa are threatened with further destruction, destined to starvation or dependence on foreign aid.

Social unrest in different parts of the continent is increasing. The uprisings in Zimbabwe are recent examples, and can be put down to a combination of government arrogance and austerity measures imposed by neo-liberal globalisation.

The most perverse consequence of marginalisation is the rise of 'ethnic' fragmentation and religious fundamentalism. Given the absence of socialism as an alternative around which to rally, marginalised communities now respond to leaders who evoke a narrow nationalism, or narrow ethnic affiliation, in a scramble for scarce resources. In some parts of Africa, particularly in the North, religious fundamentalism has taken root as an alternative to perceived 'western imperialism,' represented by the new modernistic elites and the transnational corporations for which they work.

Ethnic fragmentation was at its most extreme in the brutal massacres of Rwanda and Burundi. Although tensions between the Hutus and Tutsis have a long and complex history, the lack of development in these countries has fueled tensions. There is also evidence of collusion between Hutu leaders and the French government--emphasizing the manner in which former colonial powers have intervened to protect their access to lucrative mineral deposits and other natural resources. This has come to the fore most clearly in the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaire, where transnational mining corporations from different countries have backed one or the other political group competing for power. In Angola, the conflict has been kept going for decades by mining interests in the background.

State Retreat and Collapse

The retreat or collapse of the state in most parts of Africa has meant that the challenges of development are being placed increasingly in the hands of the NGO sector and local communities themselves. The informal economy has grown dramatically throughout Africa, and is the major source of income for urban dwellers and for many rural people. The formal economy absorbs only a fraction of the employable population (e.g., see Congo, Nabudere, and Berhanu).

In Chad, Liberia and the Sudan, there are no longer single national authorities, but competing powers, sometimes divided along religious lines. The state in the former Zaire was almost non-existent in large parts of the country, and the new government under Kabila has a long way to go before it can assert its authority everywhere. Such an assertion by a democratic government is essential for national development, which requires national cohesion.

But, as Basil Davidson has argued in his book, *The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of the Nation-State*, the nation-state in Africa was doomed from the beginning. The colonial powers carved up Africa with little regard to logical boundaries based on communities of similar language and culture. In some cases whole communities were split, resulting in on-going border disputes in many parts of the continent. The liberation movements, filled with noble ideals, assumed political power using the colonially imposed nation-state as the basis for their nationalism. In most cases they failed to serve their people. As Davidson says:

"The fifty or so states of the colonial partition, each formed and governed as though their peoples possessed no history of their own, became fifty or so nation-states formed and governed on European models, chiefly the models of Britain and France. Liberation thus produced its own denial. Liberation led to alienation."

The Neo-liberal State

The state in Africa has proved to be increasingly ineffective at a number of levels, such as in dealing with crime (see South Africa and Nigeria), socio-economic development (see most African countries), or even routine matters such as customs control (see Mozambique). The repressive arms of most states are sufficiently equipped to protect the ruling classes. However, even here this is often fragile, as those armed forces themselves are ready to assume power.

In Uganda, although the state has increased its popularity, large sections of society have no real contact with the state. Whole communities exist outside the ambit of the state. They have built their own houses, organised their own sanitation, and operate their own informal economy. They pay little or no taxes, and receive little or nothing in return. Given Uganda's adoption of neo-liberalism, with its emphasis on the free market with minimal state intervention, the state is unlikely to have such communities in its development vision--at least not in the foreseeable future.

This model of development was advocated by the Marxist sociologist Bill Warren during the 1960s. He saw the need for the full development of capitalism before socialism. This is regarded as a classical Marxist position, especially for underdeveloped social formations that need to build their productive base, primarily through the market, where external investment play a crucial role. The state plays a facilitative role, and ensures that the development of the market fits into a long-term development vision, where eventually society collectivises production, distribution and exchange. This, of course, is, from a socialist perspective, an optimistic reading of what is happening in places like Uganda. Others on the left are much more pessimistic.

The neo-liberal view is that the Ugandan state is pursuing a 'sensible' market-driven development path that inserts the Ugandan economy into the global economy, thus inviting high growth and, eventually, development and prosperity for all its people. If some communities are out of the reach of the state, then so be it. The market will inevitably cater for their needs (presumably as long as they do not resort to crime and become a menace to the urban elites).

CIVIL SOCIETY MOBILISATION IN POST-COLONIAL AFRICA

Given this historical context, what is the role of civil society in the future development of Africa? If the nation-state, as a colonial imposition, is inappropriate to the needs of Africa, what are the alternatives?

At the one extreme, there is the attempted retreat from the state. Some NGOs have been disillusioned with the struggle for state power. In Zambia, for example, NGOs have been deeply disappointed with the performance of ex-

trade unionist Frederick Chiluba after he came to power on a wave of popular mobilisation. Some now advocate localised development initiatives, which seek as far as possible to ignore the state (although, as Baylies notes, many others are seen by government as an "opposition in disguise").

At the other extreme is the return to the big state, albeit a more democratic one, and one that merges with existing states to create more logical national boundaries (for example, a union of southern African states). The most optimistic version of this is the Pan-African State, which sees all of sub-Saharan Africa, if not the entire continent, grouping together in a super-confederation, thereby creating one massive market, complete freedom of movement within African borders, and a rationalised sharing of resources.

Regional Integration and Democratic Governance

In between these two extremes is the view that the nation-state, as inadequate as it is, must be the starting point for an African renaissance. A national identity around existing nation-states has taken root in all countries--although this is much weaker in rural areas, where an 'ethnic' identity might be more pronounced. Indeed, in some rural communities an identification with cultural-linguistic kin in a neighbouring country might be stronger than an identification with fellow countrymen (see Nabudere). These nuances will inevitably need to be confronted by Africans wishing to move beyond the constraints of neo-colonialism.

In this view, the key task is the economic integration of the continent. This can occur initially at a regional level, with current trading blocs, such as the Southern African Development Community (SADC), as building blocks towards wider integration. There would need to be sufficient fluidity to allow for inter-regional trade and communication, progressively leading to one African trading bloc.

Talks in this regard have already begun in South Africa's National Economic, Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), a powerful negotiating forum that brings together government, business, labour, and other civil society interests. The labour movement has put forward a proposal that a southern African version of NEDLAC be created to oversee the process of regional integration.

These are the short- to medium-term challenges that face the continent. This view places initial emphasis on the economic dimension, and secondary emphasis on political structures such as the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), given its ineffectiveness up to now. Other continental structures, such as the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), while also hitherto ineffective, could be revitalised to build a continent-wide working class collaboration, as part of a wider synergy within civil society, as the economy becomes increasingly integrated.

Politics and economics, however, are intertwined. The new consensus, promoted by donor communities, the IMF/World Bank, and the NGO movement, is that a successful African integration requires a common set of political institutions and values across the continent. The key binding element is a belief in democratic governance, where a strong democratic state exists alongside a strong, vibrant civil society (see Muchie, 1997).

NGOs and social movements in African countries are not as optimistic as the donor communities about the development paths their countries are following. This includes newly democratised countries like South Africa, where the African National Congress (ANC) led government has embraced key elements of neo-liberalism in its macro-economic policy.

However, for democratic governance to take root, democratic organisations within civil society would have to be at the forefront of helping to rebuild the democratic state. In South Africa, this is happening through a combination of co-operation with and opposition to the governing party--what has been described as a situation of creative tension between civil society and the state.

South Africa, along with predominantly urban social formations such as Egypt, has arguably the most developed civil society on the continent. South African civil society, if we take the definition discussed above, is most developed given the country's liberal democratic constitution and practice. Egyptian society, by contrast, is more authoritarian, and therefore may be placed lower down the scale.

Should South Africa, which is still in a transition to full democracy (given its immense social inequality), be held up as a 'model' towards which other African countries should aspire? If so, then this implies that the urbanisation of Africa is a major priority, which in turn implies a modernist industrialisation of Africa, similar to that of East Asia.

Modernity and Tradition

In other words, Africa has to insert itself into the global economy in order to derive the benefits of new technology. It has to escape its embeddedness in rural subsistence and move rapidly into the industrial age. This implies a conscious shift from a predominantly rural continent to an urban one. The notion of civil society criticised by Mamdani, then, becomes more applicable--albeit one that harmonises with the peculiarities of different African cultures and traditions, which will be under continual transformation.

This view also implies an acceptance that the liberal-democratic form of governance, while initially developed in western Europe, is of universal applicability--given the integration of the world, and the adoption of similar modernist and post-modernist economic systems which rely on a particular rule-based set of administrative and political institutions in order to function optimally.

The only alternative to this long-term view is that Africa, by-and-large, remains rurally based, and protects its socio-cultural uniqueness by locking itself out of the global economy (or at best participating at the margins). This 'small-is-beautiful,' semi-autarkic notion of development has many adherents within, amongst others, the environmental movement. It seeks to escape the ravages of new technology, which it is believed serves to further alienate humankind from their harmony with nature.

However, under this pre-modernist conception of development, customary law--much of which is based on patriarchal values--will remain largely intact as there would be little or no urban modernist challenge to hereditary rule. This may be the unintended consequence of following this path.

The key to a successful transition to an industrial economy and predominantly urban society, with its associated modern political institutions, may lie in the manner in which traditional values and customs are blended with liberal-democratic values and practices.

In South Africa, this difficult road is being followed. Traditional authorities are recognized, but they are obliged to conform to modernist notions of democracy. Thus, it is proposed that rural councils are elected with hereditary chiefs occupying seats on the council, but having no voting power. Women's groups in rural areas, drawing on their urban connections (where women have won many battles), are also mounting a challenge against the chiefdoms as male preserves, demanding the right of women to stand for election as chiefs. Youth groups in rural towns, with their connections to modernist urban counterparts, continually challenge the rule of rural chiefs in many areas.

This, understandably, has been resisted by the chiefs through their representative voice, the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESAs), until recently a strong ally of the ANC. The Inkatha Freedom Party, through its domination of the House of Traditional Leaders in the KwaZulu-Natal province, also champions the interests of hereditary rulers.

The ANC government, with the support of much of civil society, has thus far resisted attempts to dilute the modernist, democratic values which underpin the new constitution in rural areas. The combination of contestation from within,

and from above, has set in motion the transformation of traditional rule such that it conforms to the non-sexist, non-racial and democratic ethos that has permeated the country after 1994.

If this modernistic notion of development is taken as a starting point, then South Africa's transition to democracy, based on building a strong democratic state and a vibrant, independent civil society, does indeed have lessons to offer the rest of the continent.

Democratic Governance: Lessons from South Africa

Civil society in South Africa is composed of a wide variety of organisations, ranging from right wing Afrikaner nationalist groups seeking 'self-determination' to an array of 'apolitical' savings clubs, sports groups, religious societies and other associations of 'everyday life' to advocacy groups on the left that represent specific interests amongst the poor and disempowered. The latter have been at the forefront of democratisation, both during the liberation struggle and now during the democratic transition.

During the 1980s, a significant number of the advocacy groups joined the United Democratic Front (UDF), an ANC-aligned umbrella that coalesced a wide range of interests into one assault on apartheid. The UDF brought together civic associations, women's groups, youth groups, religious organisations, political parties, trade unions, sports clubs, student groups and others. A significant section of the labour movement, however, stayed out of the UDF but, through the Congress of South Africa Trade Unions (COSATU), formed an explicit alliance with them.

The UDF disbanded soon after the unbanning of the ANC and South Africa Communist Party (SACP) in 1990. The civic associations formed a new body (South Africa National Civics Organisation (SANCO)), the youth groups merged with the ANC Youth League, and the women's groups merged into the ANC Women's League. The latter two lost their independent status in the process, although the Women's League played an instrumental role in the formation of the National Women's Coalition, which grouped together a wide range of women's organisations across the political spectrum.

The 'progressive' NGO community formed itself into an increasingly effective South Africa National NGO Coalition (SANGOCO), with provincial arms. Interests under its umbrella include health, land, children, urban, environment, education, media, participatory development, religious, and rural formations, which are organised on national and/or provincial bases. With the gradual demise of SANCO, the Women's Coalition and the youth groups, SANGOCO has assumed the centre stage in articulating the myriad interests among the poor and disempowered in civil society.

Outside the trade union movement, which remains the most powerfully organised formation within civil society, SANGOCO has supported and challenged the government on a range of issues, from child maintenance grants to the apartheid debt. In many of these campaigns, an alliance is sought with COSATU, the churches and other civil society formations. Recently it held country-wide Poverty Hearings in conjunction with the Human Rights Commission and the Gender Commission to highlight the impoverished conditions of the majority of South Africans.

COSATU and the two other smaller labour federations, the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) and the Federation of South Africa Labour (FEDSAL), play an active role in the multi-party structures that have emerged with political democracy. The most important of these is the National Economic, Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), which acts as the structured interface between civil society, organised business and the state. NEDLAC concerns itself with labour market policy, trade policy, macro-economic policy, and a range of development issues, where civil society is represented by the Disabled People of South Africa, SANCO and women's groups. This is replicated at regional level, although less formally, and with varying degrees of effectiveness.

At industry level there is a range of tripartite structures that brings together labour, business and the state, on issues such as health and safety and educational matters in the mines. Participation in co-determination structures places a

severe burden on the union movement, which also has to serve its members in more traditional collective bargaining ways, which can include industrial action. Trade unions are constrained to ensure that they strike a balance between the two forms of engagement with employers and the state.

While the labour movement is by-and-large financially self-sufficient, the other sectors are reliant on donor funding and, at times, (indirect) state support. With donor funding gradually drying up, the civic and women's groups are in danger of collapsing and the NGO sector is in a relatively fragile state (although likely to survive in the short- to medium-term).

Business-oriented civil society groups, such as the Centre for Development Enterprise, also play a vigorous role in promoting business views in public debate. These groups most effectively lobby for business interests outside the formal structures, as do the labour movement and the NGO coalition. Resources are devoted to making submissions to various policy formulation exercises, most notably around government green papers and white papers, which are means towards formulating government policy within various ministries and, eventually, legislation. At times communities affected by intended legislation are mobilised to make inputs, a most recent example being the Green Paper on Mining and Minerals policy, where structured sessions with affected communities around the country have been organised.

In these and other ways, civil society is helping to build a culture of democratic governance where the state is obliged to engage with civil society in the formulation of public policy.

However, as in all relationships, this system and process is tension-ridden. Government tends to want to dominate the policy process, and at times pays lip service to civil society interests. This leads to confrontation, which can take the form of public exchanges through the media and other forums, mass action and/or concerted lobbying.

The process is uneven and is often in danger of collapsing, with government accusing civil society of representing special interests to the detriment of the 'national interest,' and civil society groups accusing government of being high-handed and ignoring the views of society at large.

The mass media also plays a critical role in maintaining a culture of accountability and transparency, with differential results. The private media, being profit-making ventures, has a dual character. On the one hand, it represents the interests of its owners who are by-and-large the captains of industry. On the other hand, it seeks or pretends to represent the public interest, and as such it assumes the character of an organ of civil society. The media does hold government accountable and it provides a forum for vigorous public debate. However, this is constrained by the relatively poor quality of South African journalism in general (although radio journalism has improved considerably) and the interests of the owners of the private media. The generally low educational level of poor people also limits their direct participation in public debates, and their interests have to be articulated by the labour movement or the NGO sector, not always efficiently or effectively.

Democratic governance extends to all spheres of social life. Trade unions have made some strides in pushing back 'management prerogative' and demanding greater access to information and transparency within the corporate world. Worker participation at industry level, however, still has a long way to go. Attempts are also made to increase patient participation in hospitals, parent and student participation in schools and universities, community participation in housing projects, amongst other social spheres. The family itself has not escaped scrutiny, as the rights of wives and children increasingly come to the fore.

The big debate is how much participation is viable--can those in power give away too much, thus reducing their ability to deliver efficiently and quickly? Who in the end is 'participating'--the public at large, particularly the majority who are poor and relatively inarticulate, or a few individuals claiming to represent the public (or significant sections of the public) but who in reality represent only themselves or narrow interests?

Or are these questions posed by those with power (especially government and business) in order to undermine civil society and preserve their monopoly on power?

These are necessary and healthy questions that have been posed, and will continue to be posed, at various levels of public engagement. It is a dialectic that exists at the kernel of an attempt to build a mass participatory democracy.

Poverty Eradication

Democratic governance, however, is not seen as an end in itself. The discourse explicitly links democracy with the goal of eradicating poverty through effective development initiatives that build the capacity of beneficiaries to participate in the formulation and implementation of projects.

Initially promoted by the NGO movement as a challenge to governments and the multi-lateral institutions, 'participation' and 'capacity building' now occupy a central place in the discourse of donor communities and the IMF/World Bank (see Muchie). While some NGOs and intellectuals on the continent that were previously hostile towards the IMF/World Bank have begun to work with these institutions, other remain cautious, if not hostile. These institutions still promote neo-liberal macro-economic policies, albeit constrained by a recognition that the state has an important role to play and that human capital, in the form of education and health services, needs to be developed.

The challenge facing civil society-- which has provided essential services in various fields throughout the continent where government or business has failed--is whether they can afford to ignore the 'helping hand' offered by the World Bank. Or can they afford to accept that 'helping hand' and in the process become swallowed by agendas formulated in Washington, by well-paid 'experts' who have little empathy for the people they claim to want to serve? The Bank offers great financial rewards to individuals and organisations that work with them, and for many the temptation is too great.

Where they have collaborated, it is claimed that the resources of the World Bank are too substantial to ignore. It is not a monolithic institution, and it is transforming to, apparently, become more attuned to the real needs of the poor and dispossessed. The majority of the NGO and labour community still look on with suspicion and try their best, with the aid of donors (of social democratic persuasion), to build capacity amongst the poor, so that they can lift themselves out of poverty. This can take a variety of forms--for example church-based initiatives in Kenya (see Gathiaka), micro-enterprise development in Burkino Faso (see Congo), or other survival strategies in Uganda which, according to Nabudere, go "'beyond' the market, the 'informal sector' and the state," by using "their cultures and traditions and adapting them to 'modernity' through both the spiritual social agencies of these traditions and cultures." As Mukamba notes, much research needs to be done to understand how communities, in particular rural communities, have mobilised their resources to survive "in the wake of liberalisation."

CONCLUSION: AN AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

An African renaissance is premised on achieving sufficient economic integration across the continent, where a common democratic political culture is developed alongside the pursuit of economic co-operation. The vision includes one continent-wide free market of goods, services and labour, and a concerted programme of industrialisation and urbanisation, whereby dependence on the north for both financial aid and manufactured goods is consciously reduced. Africa might also benefit from increased linkages with other parts of the developing south, to reduce the power of Triad-based transnational corporations and develop alternative economic and communication strategies that serve to enhance the capacity of the south.

This agenda implies acceptance of the universality of liberal-democratic governance values and practices which need to be applied sensitively to the unique, still predominantly rural African realities. This includes a programme to progressively transform social relations within areas under hereditary rule and customary law which are based on

patriarchal and authoritarian values. These systems will continue to rule over large sections of the African population as long as they remain embedded in rural social relations. With industrialisation comes urbanisation and the embracing of modernity. This, evidence shows, facilitates the development of a liberal-democratic governance culture where citizens, through increased access to information and global ideas, are able to participate more vigorously in the affairs of government, business and civil society.

The alternative is to become inward looking and locked out of the technological advances of the rest of the world. This would mean remaining embedded in rural simplicity, in harmony with the environment, with an emphasis on localised basic needs. It is an alternative that will be resisted by the urbanised communities, including the rural and urban elites, who have tasted the fruits of a more complex, technologically advanced industrialised world.

A strategy that combines a focus on urban and rural development, where the latter means gradually drawing rural communities into the circuit of modernity and the fruits of technology, seems to be the only viable one. It is here that the rural-urban linkages forged by NGOs working in rural areas are important.

An African renaissance will inevitably rely on the initiatives taken by the larger economies of South Africa to the south, Kenya and Uganda to the east, Nigeria to the west, and Egypt to the north. The experiment in building a participatory system of democratic governance in South Africa needs to be embraced by all these countries. This should entail adopting the fundamental principles of freedom of association, speech and movement within the context of a strong democratic state and a strong and vibrant civil society which is constructed out of the unique conditions that prevail in each country.

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PAPERS SUBMITTED TO THE WORKSHOP

Aissata, Sidikou and Abdoukader, Naino, " Civil Society in Niger and Governance"

Berhanu, Kassahun, "The Role of NGOs in Facilitating Democratic Transition in Ethiopia"

Banda, Hestern, " Fiscal Reform: A Necessary Requirement for the Growth of NGOs and Civil Society (Malawi)"

Baylies, Carolyn, "Research on Democratisation in Zambia"

Congo, Youssoufou, "The Dynamics of the Social Economy in Sub-Saharan Africa (Burkino Faso)"

Friedman, Steven, "Some Notes on Civil Society (South Africa)"

Gathiaka, Kamau, "Civil Institutions in the Process of Change: A Comparative of Church and Labour Movements in Kenya"

Mukamba, George, "Household and Community Responses to Globalization and Their Implications for Social Policy (Uganda)"

Muchie, Mammo, "Building Civil Society Oversight in Managing the State in Africa (Kenya)"

Nabudere, Dani, "Grassroots Research in Uganda"