

Civil Society in Extraordinary Times – an Enquiry into the Role of NGOs in the
Zimbabwe Crisis

Likani Lebani

Abstract

This article explores the commonly held beliefs among civil society theorists and practitioners with regards to the relationship between civil society and the state in post-independence Zimbabwe. It suggests that civil society organizations, namely non-governmental organizations have been progressive, not as politically pluralizing entities but as agents of transformation and reconstruction through their social development projects. Such organizations have only been effective in as far as responding to service-oriented rural needs arising out of state failure. To a large extent these organizations have not been able to penetrate and mobilize rural communities for purposes of democratic change. Generally, different civil society organizations have responded differently to the current crisis. Service level non-governmental organisations though falling within the category of civil society, have inevitably failed to pursue goals that are consistent with the concept of civil society. To a large extent these organizations have acted more as grant seeking and social development agents than politically pluralizing entities. This calls for a revision of the idea that civil society organizations have the capacity to freely organize and empower their target groups to respond to a repressive state and hence to strengthen democracy. In its everyday practices initiatives of civil society organizations in rural Zimbabwe are poorly organized and reflect a conspicuous gap between the imagined ideal operations and reality. For purposes of promoting democratic change, this article calls upon rural service level NGOs to deliberately strengthen that local type of associational life, which revolves around ethical issues and is in most instances beyond the reach of the state.

Key words: civil society organizations, social projects, personal interests, organizational structure, marginal cost of democracy, funding.

Introduction

The concept of civil society has re-emerged and become of interest to development theorists and practitioners, among other social thinkers. Of interest is what makes such an elusive discourse become attractive not only in theory but practice? Over the years the likes of Migdal (1988) among others, have argued that the post independence African state is not only “too soft” or “too weak” to pursue national development objectives but is the principal impediment to social and political development. Accordingly, major development players have shifted their focus to those autonomous organs broadly construed as comprising civil society. Despite the remarkable popularity of civil society as a concept, it tends to raise more questions than answers about its present condition, relevance and usefulness. Added to this (and possibly continued polemical usage) are the numerous definitions, theories and interpretations. For countries in the South some versions of the concept are inadequate, as the roles of civil society tend to vary depending on the country’s level of development. In countries like Zimbabwe civil society has since independence been a response from society to the pre-independence problems of inequality and racial discrimination. It is also a reflection of social diversity in terms of the roles that different institutions can or cannot play in postcolonial Africa.

The shape that Zimbabwean civil society has assumed over the years shows that the concept is a highly contested terrain that is still evolving. On the face of it, civil society organizations in Zimbabwe are identified by the values they claim to hold and the causes they serve. Such an interpretation is however at risk of imminent downfall due to the changing behaviours of the same organizations. All in all, the actions of civil society organizations are a function of a number of factors that tend to vary from one institution to the next. Of note are the alliances, motivation and resources (see Zuern, 2000). Seemingly, issues of competition, transparency and self-interest are equally prevalent just like in non-civil society organizations. The operations of civil society organizations in Zimbabwe drive home the point that there is nothing intrinsic about civil society since it means different things to different people. Through a review of the operations of service-delivery civil society organizations, this article explores why such organizations have not been able to radically shift from a position of supporting the state to that of opposing it in extraordinary times? Are civil society organizations in Zimbabwe developed to such an extent as to play twin roles of

confronting a repressive state and supporting a democratic one? In addition to exploring these questions I look at why some organizations whilst within the same 'bracket' of CSOs have remained passive whilst others have expressed their concern about the declining socio-political situation.

The article is organized as follows: The first section discusses the relevance of civil society in the development discourse and tries to identify the emergence and growth of such organizations within the Zimbabwean context. This is followed by an analysis of why different CSOs behave differently in practice vis-à-vis expectations. The paper concludes with a discussion of the minimum requirements expected from civil society organizations and how organic civil society in Sub-Saharan Africa may be strengthened.

Why civil society... or is it, which civil society?

The concept of civil society has its roots in 17th and 18th century political philosophy. Increasingly the same notion is gaining importance as highlighted by its common usage in day-to-day discussions in political, socio-economic and development discourses. Despite its re-emergence the concept is not without its problems. To this day the concept remains laden with vagueness and is hardly precise. The focus of this paper is not to engage in the debate of what should be included or not included in the idea. By all means civil society has not only been discussed as a concept but has also been translated into various forms of organizations in both the developed and developing worlds. Conversely, development discourse has taken a twist and come to focus on issues of democracy on the basis that the state (especially in Africa) is the major obstacle to development. The current Zimbabwe state is perceived to lack accountability to its citizenry and is arguably riddled with corruption and authoritarianism. Inevitably, both the domestic and international communities have isolated the state and now see it as the major obstacle for development¹. It is on this understanding of development that non-state actors have increasingly gained significance and seen civil society organizations being elevated to a higher level than ever before. Conceptually, however, development, civil society and democracy

¹ Zimbabwe was suspended from the Commonwealth since 2002. Targeted sanctions were imposed on President Robert Mugabe and his allies by the European Union, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

though related, remain separate entities and should be treated as such. Hyden (1997:4) notes that civil society is an analytical category on its own, independent of democracy. Nevertheless, it is assumed that an investment in democracy is necessary to achieve development². For this paper civil society is conceptualised on the basis of associational life as argued by de Tocqueville. Civil society constitutes those “autonomous societal groups that interact with the state but delimit and constrain its actions ...that prevent the state from dominating and atomising the rest of society” (Allen, 1997:330; Gellener in Hennis and Tonkiss, 2000:2). The essence of this interpretation of civil society lies in its being separate from the state and its perceived role as a “balancing force when things get excessive” (ibid). As argued by a number of scholars civil society organizations are not necessarily homogenous and hence may be in conflict, competition and also pursue diverse interests. The relationship with the state also tends to vary from one organization to the next despite the existence of some common rules (cf. Fowler and Edwards 1996; Von Doepp (1996) in Hearn 2001:419). Of importance is which organizations should then be included in the analysis of the Zimbabwe situation.

On the basis of excluding political societies, civil society in Zimbabwe encompasses residents associations, student bodies, “voluntary organizations, community groups, trade unions, church groups, cooperatives, philanthropic organizations and a range of other non-governmental organizations” (Diamond 1994; UNDP 1993, McDonald 1997 in Hearn 2001). With such an interpretation come a number of theses intricately woven in the concept namely that civil society is not only separate from the state but also opposes it. Associated with this are arguments that “civil society is the source within contemporary African political systems of liberal democratic values of pluralism, accountability, transparency and the rule of law” (Allen, 1997:335). Secondly, civil society is perceived as the driving force behind democratisation. On the whole civil society will not only confront the state but also will also contain and constrain its scope. The implication from this understanding of civil society is that for it to flourish civil society requires minimal state intervention coupled with an

² Major development institutions like the World Bank and UNDP emphasize the “reinforcement of civil society as a way of increasing the resilience of social institutions that may be able to fend off anarchy even if the state is weak (World Development Report, 1997:160 in Hearn 2001:416). In its Human Development Report of 1993 the UNDP equally considers the strengthening of civil society institutions as a necessary policy condition for enhancing citizen participation.

extended space to express citizen freedoms. These beliefs “constitute a neo-liberal understanding package to notions of governance and contemporary International Financial Institution’s (IFI) arguments on the links between economic and political reform” (ibid). A fundamental question is the extent to which such notions explain the response of civil society to the Zimbabwean crisis. Worthy noting is that there is no direct correlation between civil society and democratisation. Some organizations may be classified as civil society yet pursue goals that contradict those expected of civil society namely self-determination, justice and the rights of citizenship against despotism. In a similar vein, certain organizations may oppose a sitting authoritarian regime only to become the next oppressors. Of essence are those factors that explain whether an organization is involved or not involved in promoting democracy. The thrust of this paper therefore lies in understanding why different CSOs take different routes and how such a genealogy of the idea (of civil society) has shaped itself and contributed to democracy vis-à-vis development in Zimbabwe.

The growth of a complex discourse

Since the attainment of independence in 1980, civil society in Zimbabwe has by and large been progressive. The question is in which manner was it progressive? In light of the past development trajectory, principal creed of that time, social forces, the nature of governance and the policy environment of the early post independence era, a number of the civil society organizations (CSO) have indeed been progressive. They have been progressive not as politically pluralizing entities but more as drivers of modernization in rural areas. Seemingly, social development NGOs tend to view the costs of engaging in political plurality initiatives as far outweighing the benefits. It would appear the actions and priorities of NGOS are determined on the basis of different perspectives that draw their influence from “values inculcated through their background and experience” (Deakin, 2001:171)³. Such perspectives unfortunately do not include a commitment to the public good of democracy.

NGOs have been relatively successful in responding to basic needs and promoting social development projects (though of a small scale nature) but have had minimal

³The Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (ORAP), an NGO discussed in this paper is one of the few (if not only NGO) that condemned the massacre of innocent people in Matabeleland during the 1980s. Since the cooption of its founder member in the current government and/or upon realizing the disutility associated with confronting the state, it has since maintained a wait and see attitude.

impact with regards to long-term social change (cf. Salamon and Anheier (1986) in Fowler (2000); Ndegwa, 1996; see Zuern, 2000). Indeed the advent of democracy saw numerous organizations emerge in an effort to rebuild the country that had been ravaged by war over the 1970s decade. Though an increase in such groups should be treated with prudence on the premise that their presence does not necessarily translate to the presence of civil society, I nevertheless maintain, but with caution, that the increase in organized groups in the Zimbabwe of the 1980s decade was indeed civil society because the actions of such groups were targeted at the public good⁴. To a certain degree some organizations were progenies of massive donor aid and resources. This does not however prevent such organizations from pursuing goals consistent with those of civil society especially when they allow for flexibility and adaptation over time and space.

In tandem with the growth of civil society groups, the new ZANU (PF) government carried forward its “mythical war time banner of Marxism-Leninism, thereby placing workers and peasants at the centre of national unity” (Sylvester, 1990). Under such a banner of nation building civil society organizations in both the urban and rural areas emerged and worked with the government in “nurturing and supporting its policies”. Over the years autonomous organizations like Christian Care, OCCZIM, the Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (herein after referred to as ORAP) and World Vision International gained dominance and became the major players in the delivery of water, health, food and related services in rural areas⁵. Similar organizations emerged in other parts of the country and managed to penetrate communities and inculcate a spirit of working together in various poverty alleviation projects⁶. As a seemingly ideal development trajectory took ground (and was proclaimed by the international community as a jewel for Africa) the government was on the one hand penetrating and restructuring society so as to achieve a more

⁴ Uvin (1998:168,171) in his chapter on *Aiding Violence-the development enterprise in Rwanda* highlights the need to treat civil society more as a qualitative matter than a quantitative one since it may not “so much reflect the presence of civic space conquered by the people going beyond the boundaries of family, ethnic group and location”.

⁵ Splichal et al (1994) view this as a “contrast between state and civil society...a contrast between the articulation of needs and the capacity of state instruments to satisfy those needs”. The implication is that of competition between state and civil society organizations and the challenge is to ensure that such competition occurs within a democratic environment.

⁶ As of 2000, a total of 850 organizations were registered as NGOs and involved in a number of activities ranging from relief, development project implementation, and advocacy among other things (Moyo, 2000).

homogenous and malleable political and economic space' that was to be closely controlled and channelled in the desired direction (Lemarchand, 1992:184).

The organizations that emerged in the 1980s decade and collaborated with the state constitute a greater part of present day civil society. Sylvester (1990) notes that elements within organizations like the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, (ZCTU)⁷, one of the most vocal in this present day even expressed their desire to be represented not only in parliament but also in key decision making structures of the ruling ZANU (PF), namely the central committee. Such organizations have seen the development of Zimbabwe from a food surplus nation to the current situation synonymous with "politically instability, low level of savings and investment, economic mismanagement, misplaced priorities, inappropriate policies, corruption, non-accountability" as well as continued authoritarian rule (Osaghae, 1994:10). If such organizations have since independence contributed to the development trajectory, what then explains the divergence in expectations and practice?

Civil society in Zimbabwe – expectations and practice

Since the symptoms of economic, political and social collapse became conspicuous, a number of civil society organizations have not taken the lead in moulding a democratic society and condemning the situation as would be expected⁸. Indeed, demonstrations driven by a handful of urban-based CSOs namely the ZCTU, National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) and some women groups have been staged. Individuals in various circles have also raised their concern about the ever-declining situation. Of concern is that the traditional established organizations working in rural areas (where 70% of the population lives) have to a large extent remained passive. The paradox is that such organizations not only work with the grassroots but also are aware of the underlying socio-political dynamics that perpetuate these worsening conditions. They are hence better positioned than anyone else to articulate the manner in which the declining political and economic situation has affected the ordinary citizen. Seemingly the course of action or preferences of these organizations lies not

⁷ Such interests were expressed when Robert Mugabe went about mobilizing loyalty among autonomous entities (Sylvester, 1990).

⁸ In response to changing donor priorities, a handful of CSOs held civic education workshops. One Christian Care donor partner (HEKS) set aside funds for human rights related issues. Regrettably, this was too little, too late and had little impact if any, on the level of political violence.

in them as institutions but is a function of other exogenous and endogenous factors. Such factors though latent over the years have widened the “gap between voluntary association imagined as ideal and the way that voluntary organizations operate in an institutional environment” (Henns and Tonkiss, 2000). It is this gap and associated factors that need exploration in an effort to understand why organizations that were seemingly progressive in the last decades now fail to respond to a repressive state.

When practices of CSOs fail to meet commonly held expectations, their ideological position is not only compromised but the confidence in them as politically pluralizing entities also declines. Without doubt the state has in the last few years tried to squash all means of protest through various restrictive pieces of legislation and control⁹. Through the use of the military, police, intelligence, war veterans, some unruly elements within the ruling ZANU (PF) and the control and manipulation of both the electronic and print media, the state has penetrated into every sphere of social life and put personal freedom almost to a halt. Despite such telling anomalies they are minimum requirements expected of civil society organizations especially that they are the drivers of rural development and in direct contact with the rural popular class¹⁰ of subsistence farmers and the self-employed. Added to is the failure of foreign invasions to bring about instant peace (e.g. in Iraq) which implies CSOs, especially NGOs, cannot only be trusted with small scale development and distributing drought relief seed¹¹ yet in them lies such a great potential for enhancing political plurality. The question for now and the future is what can Zimbabwean CSOs be trusted to do? The current version of civil society, at least in its expression as social development NGOs in Zimbabwe, is questionable and more of a quasi extension of the state or as Deakin (2001:134) puts it “a convenient mechanism for substituting for state welfare services”. Powell (2000:101) in his article *State, Welfare and Civil Society* cautions that civil society organizations and particularly NGOs should never deceive

⁹ For example, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) and the Access to Information and Privacy Act.

¹⁰ The greatest challenge to Zimbabwean authoritarian rule is likely to come from this group and the working class of unionized workers. Through the ZCTU unionized workers have openly challenged the authoritarian regime.

¹¹ Drought is a common phenomenon in Southern Africa that has seen the emergence of numerous organizations that engage in social mobilization activities for purposes of relief, recovery and mitigation programs.

themselves and strive to gain hegemony in services “ that can best be delivered by government especially when issues of coverage, equity and entitlements are valued”.

Five factors explain why established CSOs like Christian Care, ORAP and World Vision International among others have not been able to openly oppose the current authoritarian regime. These include founding member/personal interests, organizational development and structure, dependency on external funding, the lack of a visionary leadership and the costs associated with challenging the state. Ndegwa (1996:12) whilst exploring the extent to which personal politics influenced the activities of two NGOs in Kenya and hence shaped their response to the Moi regime highlights the power of personal politics in shaping NGO activities especially when dealing with issues of political reform. By all means Zimbabwean NGOs as part of CSOs are no exception. ORAP is one NGO that has managed to penetrate grassroots communities through the use of an indigenously developed development concept based on what is code-named the 7Zs and a Q¹². Though claiming that such a development concept is empowering, ORAP as an institution has failed to make good use of the opportunities with which it has been presented in service provision. This is largely explained by its connection to the repressive regime that arose out of the cooption of its founder member into the current government. Without doubt ORAP is a potentially pluralizing agent. Since 1995 its potential has however been rapidly diminishing such that its political activities and preferences now reflect those of its founder member than program beneficiaries.

Paradoxically, beneficiaries of the organization’s programs have expressed diverging interests and the desire to get the sitting government off their backs by voting for the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). It would be naïve to assume that the actions of ORAP were unconsciously empowering since similar organizations (like Christian Care and World Vision International) implementing identical projects have failed to influence political choices under the same environments. A telling story is that the collective ambitions of individuals and communities have far exceeded that of CSOs. Without doubt, communities in both urban and rural areas of Zimbabwe have significantly registered their disgust with an authoritarian regime (cf. Monga,

¹² These are Ndebele acronyms for Zenzele (do it yourself), Zimele (sustain yourself), Zihluze (examine your self), Ziqhashe (employ yourself), Qogelela (savings mobilization) among others.

1996). Though civil society in rural areas is poorly organized, there lies in this sector an organic form of civil society, which the state through its monopoly on violence has not been able to penetrate. Such civil society revolves around issues of ethical life and consists of “social groupings that are localized” and hence enjoy a sphere of autonomy beyond the reach of the state. It is this type of associational life from which service delivery NGOs should build upon for purposes of promoting democratic change (Bratton, 1994).

Another service delivery organization of interest to Zimbabwean civil society is Christian Care. A close examination of this organization is important for two reasons. Over and above the democracy enhancing potential associated with social development projects, Christian Care has since colonial times been an arm of the Protestant Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC)¹³ and continues to this day to be governed by representatives from the same body. An association with this particular body explains why Christian Care as an institution has not openly confronted the state. The church in Zimbabwe has over the years preferred to “build consensus around ‘humanistic’ national goals of a conciliatory nature in contrast to a confrontational political role” (Bratton, 1994). A striking example is the decision of the ZCC to work with the government-appointed constitutional commission despite being a founder member of the NCA. It is this unclear position of the church that contributes “to the current version of civil society” which (Hearn, 2001) notes has become a “means of stabilizing rather than challenging the social and political status quo”. A majority of church leaders inclusive those in other CSOs have failed to “situate themselves within the countries larger historical narrative, grasp the complex dynamics of its people and imagine new political strategies grounded in the best of its past yet attuned” to the existing dark circumstances (Monga, 1996:155).

Remarkably, the response of the church has not been uniform as evidenced by some leaders being brandished “enemies of the state”. Worth mentioning, is the Matabeleland archbishop of the Roman Catholic Church, Pius Ncube, who over the years has openly opposed the repressive policies of the sitting government. This he has done as an individual than institutional mandate as evidenced by the silence of

¹³ Zimbabwe has 3 main church bodies, the Protestant ZCC, Catholic Bishops Conference and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ) (USIP, 2003).

other leaders in the Catholic Bishops Conference. Although differences amongst church bodies are still prevalent, the church as a religious unit remains one of the major organs for cultivating democratic change. Church membership embraces numerous social groups, classes and ethnic groups “in contrast to labour unions which are class based and may face obstacles in attracting other elements” (Bratton, 1994). It is for this reason that the church needs to play a more conspicuous role for purposes of enhancing democracy.

In addition to the broader linkages with the church, Christian Care is one organization that is very beauracritic. Unlike ORAP where activities are remotely controlled by a founder member in government, the activities of Christian Care are nevertheless sanctioned by a governing body (National Executive Committee) whose members are equally connected to the state in various capacities. Holm et al (1996) note that though such organizations may be overhauled through organizational development initiatives, they are still confronted with elected leaders who “jealously guard their authority” thus restricting influence over the government. This is especially true where sub-committees like those at Christian Care emerge to deal with various aspects of the organization’s existence. To this end, civil society in Zimbabwe and other countries for that matter not only denotes a political meaning but is also political in its application. The shape of CSO in Zimbabwe “contains roots of power differences” that at times play a key role in perpetuating bad governance (Fowler, 2000). This reality needs reversal by way of developing a capacity for rational persuasion coupled with the “expertise to generate policy papers which compel educated civil servants to believe that a problem exists for which there is a reasonable solution (see Holms et al, 1996). The lack of such a capacity means CSOs can not gain the respect of state officials they are supposed to engage with, hence are more often, taken as just some grant seeking associations, if not development diplomats in their own countries (cf. Tvedt, 1998).

To a significant extent, service delivery NGOs have been found wanting when it comes to intentionally engaging the government on issues of democratisation. As Ndegwa (1996:16) argues the “democratisation efforts of NGOs must be deliberately sought and not expected to automatically spin off” from development projects. Just like service NGOs, movements that are vibrant in urban areas namely the NCA and

ZCTU have equally failed to penetrate the rural areas for purposes of democratic change (c.f. Mamdani, 1995). The NCA though urban biased, has successfully confronted the state through what may be termed a “vigorous social movement that may be seen as constituting a “peoples opposition” e.g. during national constitution referendum (Henns and Tonkiss, 2000). Noteworthy, is that the NCA draws its membership from a diverse range of movements. It is in this diversity where CSOs should draw their strength from, yet in it also lays their weakness. As a unit, Zimbabwean CSOs have been unable to successfully mobilize rural communities for purposes of democratic change. To a large extent civil society operations in rural areas are weakly organized compared to those in urban areas.

The ZCTU is one organization that has over the last few years organized worker demonstrations that shook both the political and economic markets. From an organization that initially wanted incorporation in the ruling party, what then explains its radical shift in ideological position? Does such a shift explain the progressiveness of the organization or other factors are at play? The actions of the labour organization have always been urban and worker driven with minimal impact on rural areas. Conversely the political opposition MDC draws much of its support from the same pool, whilst the ruling party is mainly rural. Arguably, the responses of the ZCTU have been more of a reactionary nature, largely driven by the declining welfare of the urban labour force and the membership nature of the organization. The labour union has used declining economic fundamentals as its major instrument to confront the state. Through its wisdom or lack of it, it has not dawned on the labour body that economic factors on their own cannot explain the socio-political environment since in almost all cases economic policies are an outcome of political choices. Though reactionary, the ZCTU has indeed injected an element of resistance to bad governance. It can however still perform much better given that “trade unions remain the largest organized social force that will continue to play a critical role as one of the most central social institutions in the current corporatist system” Splichal et al (1994). The global economy associated with an increase in the globalisation of production and exchange also means that trade unions have the potential to influence the state without necessarily being political societies.

A striking phenomenon is that though CSOs have not openly engaged the state on socio-political issues, the reality is that the government has acknowledged their potential impact of shifting the equilibrium in political markets. Time and again the government has amended the Private and Voluntary Organization Act (PVO) that governs the operations of CSOs in an effort to control them. NGOs, especially those distributing food relief, are increasingly perceived as a political challenge whose “benevolence needs to be directed and coordinated for it not to undermine the state” (Ndegwa, 1996:22). The logic is simple. The state is “politically dependant on citizens for its electoral support” if it is to remain in office (in addition to rigging in most African states). Food relief is however a philanthropy driven initiative where the NGO takes action on behalf of passive recipients such that it does not necessarily empower beneficiaries to react to a non-responsive state.

CSOs have indeed reacted to the uncalled for amendments of the PVO Act either as individual institutions or through the semi-active coalition, National Association of Non Governmental Organization (NANGO). Like in other regions the response of Zimbabwean CSOs has mainly been to ensure their own survival in contrast to advancing grassroots preferences (see Ndegwa, 1996). One explanation is that a majority of CSOs by virtue of their foreign funding remain one of the few institutions with access to foreign currency. Access to foreign currency is a source of power and guarantees better remuneration perks in a rapidly declining economy. Zimbabwe is one country where the situation is volatile and both individual and public perceptions of uncertainty have increased over the last few years. Financial and economic risks seem greater than ever before such that it is uncommon for CSOs to partake in rent-seeking behaviours associated with foreign currency trading. By so doing, they act in equally the same manner as elements within the repressive and corrupt state. It is under such risky environments where CSOs are called upon to be more vigilant thus increasing the trust from their target groups merely by being external to the state. Under tight control of the media, CSOs can influence change by relaying more accurate information to remote areas. Communities in remote areas face an information deficit and in the mean time can only exercise caution, unless alternative suppliers emerge. CSOs, notably NGOs can rightfully fulfil that role by way of increasing the supply of political ideas instead of vulgarising relief food and seed.

The interpretation of democracy

The nature of democracy as a ‘good’ is one factor that explains why CSOs in Zimbabwe have been unwilling to engage the state in the process of democratisation. Democracy is a “public good with a cost (in terms of the punishment those fighting for change stand to suffer at the hands of the authoritarian regime” (Olson (1960) in Monga 1996:171). Indeed one significant cost confronting most CSOs in Zimbabwe is that of deregistration. Should the actions of one CSO fruitfully contribute to democratisation, the benefits tend to accrue to society at large. It is these different utility levels that explain why CSOs will behave in contrary in common expectations. Monga (1996:172) notes that the “additional pain and deprivation suffered daily by those fighting for change is not proportional to the hard fought gain in freedom and social justice” such that CSOs tend to perceive direct actions in pursuit of democracy differently.

Funding as a limiting factor

A significant number of CSOs rely on donor funding for their activities. This in most cases is project based such that organizations do not have the leeway of channelling resources towards developing themselves into democracy enhancing institutions. CSOs are to a great extent funded for what they are doing as compared to their potential of what they can do. Fowler (2000) notes that the “unfair, power-imbalance and donor serving framework of aid they operate in” limit CSOs. In addition to their own limited capacities the nature of the aid system continues to hinder the “mobilization by larger civil society with NGOs to bring about genuine development in the third world” (ibid).

Minimum requirements

Since the attainment of independence, the Zimbabwean political market may be viewed as a monopoly in which the dominant ZANU (PF) has never been willing to accept new participants¹⁴. With such a backdrop, herein lies the role of civil society. On the premise that development follows democracy, civil society should strive to ‘talk the talk’ and ‘walk the walk’ of politics. Undeniable, the political environment has never been all smooth sailing yet civil society has over the years been unwilling to

¹⁴ See Sylvester (1990) for references on Zimbabwe elections since 1980.

abide by the rules¹⁵. My position is that if civil society is to at least meet the minimum requirements of being ‘civil’ it should “momentarily suspend divergent interests in favour of the common goal of removing the incumbent” authoritarian regime (O’Donnell and Schmitter in Bratton (1994:62). This can be done without the need for CSOs to transform themselves into political societies (that endeavour to win and manage political competition). The ideal route relates to the strengthening of local associational life or what may be termed ‘organic’ civil society. This way of life already exists and only needs further mobilization for purposes of democratic change. Despite the harsh socio-economic conditions rural communities have not reached the requisite level of anger to drive out a repressive regime. CSOs should therefore take it upon themselves to “revive collective identifications which embody the explosion of a highly repoliticized and angry society” that obtains along ethnic neutral dimensions (ibid). With such an approach, only then can the repressive state be expected to respond.

Furthermore, civil society should continually mediate between the state and market instead of taking a silent position. In spite of the restraining pieces of legislation, CSOs should stop defining and subscribing to the narrow development principles of authoritarian regimes. By all means, they should desist from practicing the game of abstinence from politics if they are to play any meaningful role in the emergence and sustenance of democratic values.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I note that civil society in Zimbabwe (mainly as represented by NGOs but not restricted to the same) represents those organizations that have been able to identify basic community needs and equally satisfy them. Through the support of donor agencies, CSOs have been able and willing to meet such needs even under restrictive regulations. Despite the relative hegemony gained in service provision, it would be misleading to argue that CSOs should continue rendering such services (even in a globalizing world). In light of the skewed development trajectory (with its

¹⁵ After the attainment of independence, the country saw seven years of fighting directed at mainly the non-Shona speaking people, in what is commonly referred to as the ‘Matabeleland disturbances’. Even under such disturbances civil society never talked the talk of political reconciliation. One supposition could be that local CSOs like World Vision (that have close links to international bodies) thought racial harmony was more critical by then, than ethnic stability.

roots in discriminatory colonial policies and post-independence biases) civil society in Zimbabwe can only be ‘civilized’ if it exists side by side with a welfare state. This is especially true when issues of equity and coverage are taken into account. The nature of NGO development in Zimbabwe depicts interdependence with the state. Such a relationship, because of historical, economic, social and political factors is here to stay for now and the near future. In essence the heart of civil society lies in political strategies that are based on equality and empowerment. Inevitably, these attributes are found in the same services that CSOs provide in rural areas. It only remains with the CSOs themselves to realize their potential in advancing democracy and political plurality. This can however only be done when the same CSOs detach themselves from those interests that solely link them to their own survival.

References

- Allen, c. (1997) “Who Needs Civil Society”, *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 73, pp 329-337.
- Barber, B.R. (1998) *A Place for Us- How to make society civil and democracy strong*, New York: Hill and Wang.
- Blankson, I.A. (2002) “Re-examining civil society in emerging Sub-Saharan African democracies: the state, the media and public in Ghana”, *Global Media Journal* Vol. 1 (1).
- Bratton, M. (1994) “Civil Society and Political Transition in Africa” in Harberson, J.W.; D. Rothchild; N. Chazan (eds) *Civil Society and the State in Africa*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Cohen, J.L. and A. Arato (1997) *Civil Society and Political Theory*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Deakin, n. (2001) *In Search of Civil Society*, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave.
- Fine, B. (1999), “The Development State is Dead-Long live social capital”, *Change*, Vol. 30(1).
- Fowler, A. (2000) *Civil Society, NGOs and Social Development: changing the rules of the game*, Occasional paper No. 1, Geneva: United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD).
- Friedman, S.(2000) *Golden Dawn or White Flag? The state, civil society and social policy* Centre for Policy Studies, Johannesburg.

Harberson, J.W. (1994) "Civil Society and Political Renaissance" in Harberson, J.W.; D. Rothchild; N. Chazan (eds) *Civil Society and the State in Africa*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Henns, L.C. and Tonkiss, F. (ed) (2000) *Trust and Civil Society*, New York: St Martins Press LLC.

Holm, J.D; P. Malutsi; G. Somolekae (1996) "The Development of Civil Society in a Democratic State: the Botswana model", *African Studies Review*, Vol. 39 (2), pp43-69.

Hudduck, A.C. (1999) *NGOs and Civil Society-democracy by proxy?* USA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Hyden, G. (1997) 'Civil Society, Social Capital and Development: dissection of a complex discourse', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 32 (1), pp 3-30.

Hearn, J. (2001) "The 'Uses and Abuses' of Civil Society in Africa", *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 87, pp 43-53.

Kinyunjui, K. (2001) *Questioning Civil Society in Africa-An Overview of the second ISTR Africa Research network meeting*, Nairobi.

Lemarchand, R. (1992) "Uncivil States and Civil Societies: how illusion became a reality", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 30 (2), pp 177-191.

Mayekiso (1992), "Working Class Civil Society – why we need it, and how we get it, *African Communist*, 2nd Quarter.

Mcllwaine, C. (1998) "Civil Society and Development Geography", *Progress in Human geography*, no. 22 93), pp 415-424.

Monga, C. (1996) *The Anthropology of Anger- civil society and democracy in Africa*, London: Lynne Reinne Publishers.

Moyo, S; J. Makumbe; B. Raftopoulous (2000) *NGOs, the State and Politics in Zimbabwe*, Harare: SAPES Books.

Ndegwa, S.N. (1996) *The Two Faces of Civil Society-NGOs and politics in Africa*, Connecticut: Kumarian Press Inc.

Nyang'oro, J.E. (1999) *Civil Society and Democratic Development in Africa-Perspectives from Eastern and Southern Africa*, Gweru: Mambo Press.

Nzimande and Sikhosana (1992), "Civil Society and Democracy", *African Communist*, 2nd Quarter.

Organization of Rural Associations for Progress (undated) *Profile*

Osaghae, E. (1994) "Between the individual and the state in Africa: the imperative of development" in Osaghae, E. (ed) *Between State and Civil society in Africa – Perspectives on development*, Senegal: Codesria.

Padayachee, V. and A. Habib (2000) "Economic Policy and Power Relations in South Africa's Transition to Democracy" in *World Development*, Vol. 28 (2).

Powell, F. (2000) "State, Welfare and Civil Society" in Tonkis, F; A. Passey with N. Fenton; L.C. Hennis (eds), *Trust and Civil Society*, New York: St Martins Press LLC.

Putman, R.D. (1995) "Bowling alone: Americas declining social capital", *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.6 (1).

Sachikonye, L.M. (undated) *The emerging Civil Society in Africa: is it democratic or sustainable? DPMF Workshop and Conference Proceedings*, DPMF Publications.

_____ (2002) *Leadership, civil society and democratization in Zimbabwe*, Development Management Forum Policy Brief Series, No. 4, Addis Ababa.

Salamon, L.M. and H.K.Anheier (2000) *Social Origins of Civil Society: An Overview*, The John Hopkins Comparative Non-profit Sector Project.

Seligman, A.B. (1992) *The Idea of Civil Society*, New York: The Free Press.

Sparks, C. (1994) "Civil Society and information Society as Guarantors of Progress" in Splichal, S; A. Calabrese and C. Sparks (eds) *Information Society and Civil Society*, Indiana: Purdue University Press.

Splichal, S; A. Calabrese and C. Sparks (eds) (1994) *Information Society and Civil Society*, Indiana: Purdue University Press.

Sylvester, C. (1990) "Simultaneous revolutions: the Zimbabwe case" *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 16 (3), pp 452-475.

_____ (1990) "Unities and disunities in Zimbabwe's 1990 election", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 28 (3), pp 375-400.

Tvedt, t. (1998) *Angels of Mercy or Development Diplomats-NGOs and foreign aid*, Trenton: African World Press.

United States Institute of Peace (2003) *Special Report – Zimbabwe and the Prospects for Nonviolent Political Change*, Washington DC.

Uvin, P. (1998) *Aiding Violence- the development enterprise in Rwanda*, Kumarian Press.

Zuern,E.(2000) "The changing roles of civil society in African democratisation process" in Solomon,H and Liebenberg, I. *Consolidation of democracy in Africa- A review from the South*, Burlington: Ashgat.