

## **Civil Society organizations (CSOs) compose the Second Pillar of the State.**

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### **SUMMARY**

The role of civil society organisations (CSO) is often undervalued, and yet CSOs are vital for development, disarmament, conflict resolution and the rule of law. Experience from many African nations – as well as Europe, America and Asia – provides compelling evidence that civil society plays a fundamental role in social progress. Civil society also provides some of the basic building blocks that promote good governance. Our recent personal experience of working with CSOs includes India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Cambodia; Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Liberia and Sierra Leone in West Africa; Cameroon, Kenya, Burundi, DRC and other countries. In the present document we provide a few select examples – particularly from West Africa - to illustrate the importance of CSOs and their collective role as Second Pillar of the State in countries where institutions are weak and threat of military rule is real.

#### **Structure:**

**What are Civil Society organisations?**

**Traditional and Modern CSOs**

**Civil Society is especially important for expressing the voice of women.**

**Civil society and Social Capital**

**The Social Economy**

**Civil Society is an integral structure – and Second Pillar – of the Nation State**

**Civil Society plays a key role promoting peace and DDR**

**Civil society strengthens good governance**

**Conclusion**

### **What are Civil Society organisations?**

Civil society is composed of voluntary interest groups that want to get something specific done, **"those citizens who form themselves into associations to promote an interest which does not include seeking or exercising political power."** The individual is part of society, but does not by himself form part of "Civil Society": to do so, he must join an organized group such as cooperatives, associations (including village associations, women's groups, youth groups, NGOs), mutualist insurance, savings or credit groups, social enterprises (such as *groupements d'intérêts économiques* GIE), trade unions and professional associations, like hunting societies and village councils, football clubs and youth associations, the Red Cross and the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides.

Some civil society organisations (CSO) have shallow roots, based on a small urban group of elitists or on donor funds. Others are community-based organizations (CBO) with deep roots in their society. These are the most important: especially CBOs with an economic base.

### **Traditional and Modern CSOs**

There is a creative tension with potential synergy between "modern" civil society (largely, although not entirely, a product of the urban environment) and "traditional" civil society (composed of village councils, sororities, hunters' associations, ecological protection and environmental-management units, age-groups for both men and women which have important functions in education and governance, initiation and mutual self-help). CBOs span both: the modern farmers' association has roots in the community, even though it exists in response to the mercantile economy; the parent-teacher association may run a modern school, with parents rooted in their community. In recent years some of the international NGOs have found themselves increasingly in competition with local NGOs, and the best of them have understood the need either to develop roots in the African or Asian social economy, or to work with already-rooted CBOs.<sup>i</sup>

In a country like Mali or Senegal, where a real measure of decentralization has been enacted, local Communes are run by elected officials from "political society". On the other hand, village councils chaired by the *chef de village* can be considered part of civil society because the Chief's exercise of administrative power emerges from his or her place in the community: since every head of family and each member of the senior age-group is automatically a part of the Council, we may conclude that they exercise social power, not political power.

Are church and mosque groups a part of civil society? Maybe. Certainly political parties are not. Political society is separate and different from civil society because politicians are seeking to exercise power. The same is true for leaders of the imported religions (mainly Islam and Christianity), who have a long tradition of exercising their spiritual power for political purposes, to influence the way their congregations think and act and spend their money. Maybe traditional shamans, druids and marabouts are a part of the informal social fabric, while formal church and mosque structures create a different, formal and religious fabric. These divisions may be pragmatic rather than rigid, for social boundaries are fluid and they vary from one society to another. Our preference for the "separation of church and state" leads us to keep 'civil society' as a secular concept, distinct from political society, religious society and from profit-making private or public companies.

### **Civil Society is especially important for expressing the voice of women.**

Women hold a pre-eminent place in West African family and clan structure, which is the basic unit of traditional civil society. In the village and the family, the women are heard loud and clear; yet in the wider political spaces, they quickly lose their audience. Women's ideas are seldom heard as stridently as those of their husbands and brothers in regional and national politics, which occupy a new social and political space. Changing times require changing habits; Africa and Asia need to create more place for the female voice in socio-political debate.

In the short period since Malians regained the right of association, for example, after the 1991 revolution which ended 23 years of military rule<sup>ii</sup>, the country has seen the emergence of

ever-stronger women's groups. Numerous women's NGOs work particularly in education, health and family planning, and the increasingly wide network of mutualist health centres and savings banks reach deep into rural communities where most women have never had the opportunity to learn to read. There are very few of the poorest women in the urban-based associations supported by donors.

Even under the laws of decentralization, the parent teacher associations and community health clinics (CESCOMs) have been under constant threat of greater control by ministries. The same centralizing pressure affects forest products and savings unions, where women are major beneficiaries and in constant tension with government officials who feel powerful, even superior. At the national level in Mali, the CAFO = *Coordination des Associations Féminines* has a high profile, and yet the struggle is permanent to find ways for women to influence policy in government ministries and private sector institutions dominated by men. CSOs have organised in order to resist centralized mis-governance, and they are strengthened by the long traditions of mediation inherited from the medieval Ghana and Mali Empires.

### **Civil society and African social capital**

When disputes arise in African society, many mechanisms exist for mediation. First are the family and village networks. If the dispute goes beyond the village, civil society associations intervene – such as the hunters' association, which is often involved because so many disputes involve boundaries or livestock. If violence threatens, the griots and negotiators get to work – including women. Finally the Chiefs and spiritual leaders come into play. The complete set of networks involved in this process is known in the jargon as 'social capital'. In his book *Long Walk to Freedom* Nelson Mandela calls it *ubuntu*, 'fellowship'. Unlike financial capital which can be measured in Dollars, Rands or Naira, social capital is an intangible set of values and connections that makes a country, or a community, strong.

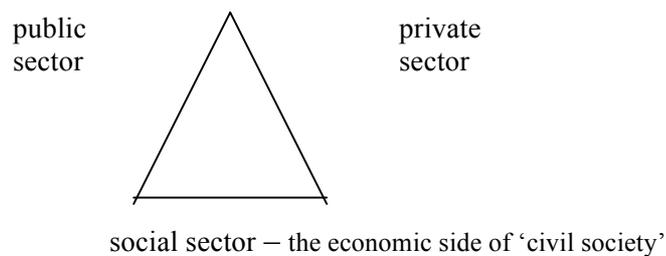
Malian examples are especially helpful for understanding the make-up of social capital in Africa. One special tradition is known in French as 'cousinage'. In English sometimes this is translated as a 'joking relationship' that exists between certain clans and ethnic groups. The name is *senenkunnya* in Bambara, describing an idea that does not easily translate. Blacksmiths and Fulani herders, for example, are 'cousins' who may insult each other with impunity (and indeed they should do so!), but they would never intermarry and they can never fight. In case of a dispute between two Fulani men, anyone from a Blacksmith clan can intervene and the Fulanis will stop fighting.

Another vital element of social capital in *jatiguiya* or 'hospitality' that lasts between families for generations. It is a mutual honor to receive, and to be lodged. If your grandfather was the host of a traveler, then you will host his grandchildren and they will do the same. There is a proverb that says: "it is better to change towns, than to change loggers." The origins of 'cousinage' and 'hospitality' lie in the age-old necessity of economic and security interdependency. In the case we cited above, bronze-age Fulani herders were driven from the Nile valley by Hittite warriors wielding iron. They migrated westwards some 4000 years ago to the Niger valley, where they found blacksmiths forging the metal they needed. In return, the Fulani nomads brought cattle and milk products. Exchange is the foundation stone of lasting friendship, and this 'fellowship' is what makes West African civil society such a rich source of wisdom and peace. That is what is called 'social capital' – the invisible links that bind society together.

## **The Social Economy**

We identify an economy composed of the public sector, the private sector and the social sector. Their relationship is conveniently represented as a triangle.

### *The Social Economy*



The ‘social sector’ is sometimes described as ‘third sector’. We prefer the former term, which emphasizes the associative nature of these economic activities and the fact that they offer an opportunity for women to participate (and even to take leadership roles) in the economy. CSOs are often the leading actors in the social sector of the economy: especially CBOs with a productive vocation such as agriculture, artisan production, or savings and credits.

The public sector and the private for-profit sector are notoriously dominated by men. In the social economy, women can take them on and win!

## **Civil Society is an integral structure of the Nation State**

Western political theory identifies the three pillars of the State: the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary. This analysis is inadequate for Africa especially, where the military often captured the Executive and with it, control of the Legislature and the Judiciary (reduced to a role of rubber-stamping military executive desires). We believe that two more Pillars of the State need to be added for analysis in Africa: the military, and civil society.

West Africa has been governed for thousands of years by Civil Society – which is an African form of democratic governance. Democracy is not simply the act of voting, as Westerners often seem to think. Every family is represented in the African Village Council. Every child – male and female – becomes part of an age-group. Civil society is African, and it is time to recognize that Civil Society is an integral part of the West African Nation State – one of the Five Pillars of the State. After the Executive (led by the President) civil society emerges as the Second Pillar of the State. It is only a strong civil society, acting as a watchdog, that has the power to make the others function properly.... including the military.

**Civil society** (including inter-faith councils, unions and cooperatives, women’s groups, press associations and the media) **has become one of five pillars supporting the modern West African state**, alongside the Executive, Legislature, Security Forces and the Judiciary.

So we propose a Five-Pillar theoretical structure for the modern African Nation State:

- The Executive
- Civil Society (which includes the press)
- The Judiciary
- The Legislature
- The Armed Forces

In most African countries, CSOs are vital for justice: without the pressure of organized civil society, judges are weak, police are venal and there can be no rule of law. As a form of democratic representation, civil society organisations – particularly community-based organisations (CBO) with real roots in society and not just in the capital city - have actually supplanted the legislature in some countries where parliamentarians are simply rubber-stamps for the Executive. Where there is no coherent system of checks and balances in effect, CSOs may even become the principal source of civilian oversight of the armed and security forces and the influence that persuades the military to return to their barracks.

CSOs are necessary development partners for governments and international organizations. Without human rights organizations and strong local governance groups, the abuse of power will not be curbed. The political strength of civil society seems to have been increased by the use of social media and cell phones. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, technology has recently become a ‘force multiplier’ for civil society.

### **Civil society has a key role in promoting peace and DDR**

CSOs and CBOs also play a significant role in disarmament and in DDR – or the processes we prefer to call 3D4R: disarmament, demobilisation, destruction of weapon stocks, reinsertion, reintegration, rehabilitation, and reconciliation. Because of their close work with communities, CSOs are often more trusted than government officials. In the case of Cambodia, where the EPES Mandala team led by General Henny van der Graaf worked under an EU flag, CSOs were vital partners in creating public awareness about the dangers of small arms and light weapons (SALW), unexploded ordnance (UXO) land mines.

When weapons were exchanged for community development projects, it was development CSOs that implemented the micro-projects with villagers. Human Rights groups provided training for police and local authorities, and helped to rebuild civil-military and civil-police relations strained by 30 years of banditry and civil war. Cambodian society has no tradition of CBOs; but the pagoda – a peaceful institution led by monks and elders - provided the civil society space where villagers could leave their weapons anonymously, for later collection and destruction by the authorities. By the time the EU-ASAC<sup>iii</sup> had finished six years of security sector reform and disarmament, almost 200,000 weapons had been destroyed by the Royal Cambodian Government. None of that could have been achieved without CSOs.

The Mali peace process of 1992-1996 was the product of civil society in partnership with the nation’s new democratic leadership. Mali’s first elected head of state, Dr Alpha Oumar Konaré was himself a leader of civil society (he had been successively a leader of the teachers’ union, mutualist health clinics, and the publishing cooperative Jamana).

The 1996 Peace of Timbuktu was negotiated by the combination of traditional and modern civil society. The Government made space for community leaders, who came together for reconciliation in large meetings uniting all people who used a common ecological space. “Space” was therefore defined in terms of economic value, ignoring artificial administrative borders. NGOs (both local and international) gave stimulus and encouragement, communications and small funding. The Malian peace machinery worked successfully. The United Nations helped, by adding occasional drops of diplomatic oil (and a modest amount of money) into the peace machinery in order to help it turn more smoothly at certain key points.

### **Civil society produces and strengthens good governance**

In the aftermath of conflict and in rural areas where officials often act with impunity, the presence of CSOs can limit abuses of power. Liberia provides numerous good examples of CSOs working in this way.

When EPES Mandala was advising UNDP on post-war peace building strategies, a survey of CSOs discovered numerous examples of abuse by warlords and corruption by government officials that were revealed or thwarted by alert citizen associations of various kinds.

The women marketeers’ associations emerged as a powerful force for both economic development and conflict mediation, because of their role as economic associations and because of their presence country-wide. The same thing was a notable feature of the Sierra Leone peace process, where the Campaign for Good Governance (founded by women) became the leading organization promoting democracy and reconciliation in the country. At the same time, CGG mobilized women to fight against social and domestic violence and to promote economic development.

Throughout West Africa, in families and associations, it is the women who are described by their men as ‘my minister of finance’. It is widely accepted that women are more honest, more committed to the group and to their children, less egotistical than their husbands. In such a culture, it seems clear that women need to be used in areas where they are most respected; and that this mobilisation of women for positions of responsibility will lead to better governance throughout the society.

### **Conclusion**

Without CSOs and especially the mobilization of women, good governance cannot succeed. We are not arguing for the replacement of the State by non—State actors, simply that the State cannot do everything and that its natural partners in grassroots development and good governance are civil society organisations. The closer we can come to the community, the more successful we shall be in promoting peace and reconciliation, sustainable development and good governance.

Every society is different. Political systems evolve their own characters and we are not suggesting that one rule will fit every case. Cambodia is not Liberia is not Sierra Leone is not Mali! In West Africa, however, civil society was the governance mechanism until the colonial period – and it has again become, a fundamental pillar of the modern West African State. We argue that civil society is the *de facto* Second Pillar of the African State.

## There are never ‘too many’ CSOs

Governments will only produce good governance if civil society organizations make their voices heard. You cannot have too many civil society voices. Governments need to be hassled. Civil servants must be forced to hear every side of every question.

Civil servants are not usually keen supporters of civil society. Bureaucrats do not like to hear a multitude of dissident voices. They see CSOs as pressure groups led by troublemakers who are determined to make themselves heard. We say, “Good for the troublemakers!” You cannot have too many associations and interest groups. Clubs and charity associations enrich a country. CSOs are the only organizations that provide ordinary citizens with a chance to participate in the daily life of a nation. Politicians and civil servants get confused by hearing too many voices, so they don’t much like civil society. They are wrong! You can have too many soldiers and too many civil servants, or too many foreigners and too many locusts, but you cannot have too many associations and CBOs that exist to help people and get them involved, to make things better and get things done.

Civil society is a traditional and vital force in West Africa. Civil Society is one of five pillars supporting the modern West African state, alongside the Executive, the Legislature, Security Forces and the Judiciary. The other four work properly – working in a transparent fashion and respecting the boundaries of good governance - only if civil society is strong and organized and refuses to be ignored.

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<sup>i</sup> *Peacemaking and Sustainable Human Development*

*Big pictures or small projects: collaboration between UNDP and civil society in Mali*  
by Robin Edward Poulton, Ibrahim ag Youssouf, and Mahamane Baby, May 1999  
on the web at UNDP, New York

ii. The history of modern Mali and its Presidents can be summarised as follows:

1880-1960	centralised repressive colonial rule
1960-1968	one-party centralisation under Modibo Keita
1968-1978	military dictatorship under Moussa Traore and other colonels
1979-1991	centralised one-party repression under Moussa Traore
1991-1992	transition to democracy under Amadou Toumani Touré
1992-1999	attempts at participatory decentralisation under Mali’s first democratically elected President, Dr Alpha Oumar Konaré

1999-2002	decentralization is put in place with elected Mayors in 701 Communes
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2002-2006	Amadou Toumani Touré elected to a first four-year term as President.
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<sup>iii</sup> European Union assistance for curbing small arms and light weapons in Cambodia, a disarmament and peace building project that lasted from 2000 until 2006.