The Civil Society Landscape in Sierra Leone

Understanding Context, Motives and Challenges

June 5, 2007

Africa Region External Affairs Unit (AFREX)
### ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABU</td>
<td>Agricultural Business Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>All People's Congress Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APRM</td>
<td>African Peer Review Mechanism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRA</td>
<td>Bike Riders Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community-Based Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDHR</td>
<td>Center for Democracy and Human Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>CGG</td>
<td>Campaign for Good Governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSOs</td>
<td>Civil Society Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DACO</td>
<td>Development Assistance Coordinating Unit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DDR</td>
<td>Disarmament, Demobilization, and Re-integration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DfID</td>
<td>Department for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENCISS</td>
<td>Enhancing Interaction and Interface between Civil Society and the State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FAWE</td>
<td>Forum for African Women Educationalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORDI</td>
<td>Forum for Democratic Initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIPC</td>
<td>Highly-Indebted Poor Country Initiatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGOs</td>
<td>International Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRC-SL</td>
<td>Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODE</td>
<td>Ministry of Development and Economic Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MRD</td>
<td>Movement for the Restoration of Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NaCSA</td>
<td>National Commission for Social Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCRRR</td>
<td>National Commission for Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Resettlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPRC</td>
<td>National Provisional Ruling Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEPAD</td>
<td>New Partnership for Africa Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NFHR</td>
<td>National Forum for Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NMJD</td>
<td>Network Movement for Justice and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>NPRC</td>
<td>National Provisional Ruling Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUSS</td>
<td>National Union of Sierra Leone Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMC</td>
<td>Project Management Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRSP</td>
<td>Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHARP</td>
<td>Sierra Leone HIV/AIDS Response Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLAJ</td>
<td>Sierra Leone Association of Journalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLANGO</td>
<td>Sierra Leone Association of Non Governmental Organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLAU</td>
<td>Sierra Leone Association of University Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLBA</td>
<td>Sierra Leone Bar Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLLC</td>
<td>Sierra Leone Labor Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLMDA</td>
<td>Sierra Leone Dental and Medical Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLPP</td>
<td>Sierra Leone People's Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLPTU</td>
<td>Sierra Leone Petty Traders Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLTU</td>
<td>Sierra Leone Teachers Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLWM</td>
<td>Sierra Leone Women's Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRC</td>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNPP</td>
<td>United National Peoples Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCD</td>
<td>Village Development Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>WRCP</td>
<td>World Council on Religion and Peace</td>
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Preface

In conflict affected countries, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) - in the absence of a strong Government – play a critical role in providing services to citizens, and at times substitute for public institutions and become primary providers of basic social services. The international donor community participates in countries affected by conflict and instability by relying on CSOs to reach the poor, and to respond to humanitarian crises. While the prominent role of CSOs in social service delivery and other development activities is often seen as an interim solution, it may extend for years, even decades. Basic services – such as food distribution and water/sanitation amenities, as well as long-term developmental interventions such as re-establishing health facilities and educational programs - are often managed by such organizations. Recognizing that reliance on CSOs is likely to prevail for the foreseeable future in many countries, it is important to examine the current landscape of CSOs. The key questions to be addressed are: Who are these CSOs? What is their role? Who is funding them? Who are they accountable to?

The urgent need to ensure the assessment of the CSOs landscape in fragile states derives from four critical factors. Firstly, the risk of unaccountable and fraudulent CSOs has proven more evident in zones of post-conflict recovery. The mushrooming of CSOs is a logical response to the vacuum created by the lack of public funds and services for the people, and the immediate influx of donor funding. The urgency of humanitarian support provides a perfect opportunity to the unemployed or unpaid civil servants in chaotic political conditions and dubious commitment to the communities, to form organizations. Secondly, while the prominent role of CSOs in social service delivery and other development activities is often seen as an interim solution, the donors rely on their work for years, which amplifies the need to ensure their accountability from the very early beginning of their work. Thirdly, the absence of sanctioned legal frameworks in the fragile states hampers serious intentions to implement necessary checks and balances or accountability mechanisms. Fourthly Governments, frustrated by the slow pace of international funding for public sector, see the donor funded CSOs as their competitors and hence legitimate ground to indict CSOs for being inefficient, and even loyal to foreign agendas.

The reliance on CSOs in fragile countries is not matched with a good understanding of who CSOs are, how they work, how they interact with each other and their beneficiaries and most importantly, who are they accountable to. Better understanding of these organizations can help address the challenges of development impact and accountability. Specifically, more knowledge about the CSOs and the civil society landscape generally will constructively inform the Bank’s operations and internal decision making.

Country Context

Sierra Leone has gone through eleven years of war and over four years of recovery since the war was formally declared ended in March 2002. The international donor community has been providing support to the recovery process, seeking to achieve a number of outcomes relating to: a) consolidating peace and security, b) improving economic growth through increased productivity to reflect the country’s diverse endowment of valuable natural and human resources, and c) improving governance and accountability to ensure the equitable distribution of the benefits of growth.

In grappling with the challenges of realizing these results, there has been growing donor recognition of the importance of partnership with civil society, as the experience of dealing solely with traditional government agencies has been found to be inadequate in achieving targets and results. In this regard, enormous resources from some key donor institutions have often been channeled through Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), both local and international. However, there has also been a growing concern, as in the case of government, over the quality of development outcome resulting from partnerships with the CSOs usually serving as implementing agencies, consultants and facilitators of development initiatives. International donors have, in most instances, engaged such agencies, consultants and facilitators in the absence of a reliable data about them and the social, economic and political environments in which they operate. This is largely because there has been no in-depth study and analysis of the country’s civil society landscape.
Where such studies have been done, they have been limited to scoping and profiling the CSOs and assessing their capacities for undertaking development work without much probe into the contexts of their operations; the factors that inspire their organizational formation, growth and transformation; the religious, social, economic and political causes they pursue; their organizational policy environment: whether or not they have latent and revealed economic, political and ideological agendas; how such agendas are compatible with the democratic tenets of diversity, pluralism and equal opportunities, their track-record in sustaining development work, their value systems, motives and motivation.

In view of the above, international donor organizations, including the World Bank, are now faced with the challenge of ensuring transparency and accountability in the government and civil society settings, maintaining a balance between the necessity to strengthen civil society organizations without disempowering the government, and empowering the government without weakening the participative role of civil society. This study is therefore motivated by the strong need to guide the tripartite partnership now seemingly emerging among the international donor community, the government and civil society.

**Methodology**

The compilation of information and data for the study was conducted through formal and informal interviews with the CSO staff and the communities served by the CSOs, and gathering and analyzing existing information available from donor agencies and the government. The formal interviews were based on a set of questions to establish consistency. The informal interviews also used a set of given questions. The report represent qualitative and quantitative outcomes and an analysis of the data, followed by concrete recommendations for implementation and follow up.

**Scope of Work and Deliverables**

While the consultancy gathered the basic quantitative information to provide a sense of thorough concrete data, the study was designed to undertake an in-depth probe into the qualitative issues associated with how the key CSOs in Sierra Leone were established, what factors inspired their organizational formation, growth and transformation, their ideological cause and operational frames of reference, their latent and revealed agendas, their commitment and sustainability track-record, and their motives and motivation. The study analyzed the evolution and current activities of the CSOs within the emerging social, economic and political contexts of post conflict Sierra Leone, taking note of the current trends in global development thinking and policy.
Executive Summary

This study moves away from the civil society for Africa model to a civil society in Africa model. The civil society for Africa model seeks to transfer notions and practices of civil society in the liberal democracies of Europe and North America to Africa as the only way to bolster economic development and good governance in the continent. Whilst this present study is also geared towards centering civil society in development and good governance initiatives, it rejects the civil society for Africa model as missing out on the organizational forms and modes of operation of many groups in Africa that perform such civil society roles as aggregating opinion, engaging the state and other authorities, promoting participation, enhancing accountability, delivering services and countervailing actions that they evaluate as not in the interest of their members or constituents.

The civil society in Africa model has enabled us to distinguish three broad types of civil society formations in Sierra Leone. These are the formal civil society groups whose organizational forms and operational logic closely approximates western notions of civil society; neo-traditional civil society groups which combine both western and indigenous organizational forms, criteria and modes of operation; and the traditional indigenous civil society groups which organizational forms and operational logic mirror indigenous cultural practices.

The study maps out the different types of organizations that could be found in the three civil society formations, describe their organizational forms, motivations, modes of operation and the challenges they face in post conflict Sierra Leone.

The study reveals that civil society groups are playing important roles in the various good governance and development initiatives. Neo-traditional and traditional civil society have immense social capital, and they are closer to and more involved in the lives of ordinary people and their communities. Modern civil society groups have played major intermediation roles between the government, donor agencies and communities in delivering services, exacting accountability and raising awareness about democracy and human rights.

Summary of Challenges

However, civil society groups at both the formal and traditional levels face immense challenges that are severely limiting their contributions. These challenges range from non-recognition and non-engagement of neo-traditional and traditional civil society groups by donor and development agencies to poor regulatory framework, weak financial base and low capacity of formal civil society groups. Challenges have been distinguished into three types: those that are internal to these organizations themselves; those that emanate from the state and limitations derived from general socio-cultural context within which the groups operate.

The main limitations from the socio-cultural context include entrenched patriarchy and marginalization of women and youths. Whilst this limitation generally affects all types of civil society groups, they are more salient in such traditional civil society formation as sodalities. The major challenges that are internal to civil society groups include the following:

- Low Levels of Institutionalization

Though the country has hundreds of ‘formal civil society groups; most of them lack organizational autonomy, coherence of mandate, functional boundaries and reliability of procedures and adherence to them. A huge number of civil society organizations in Sierra Leone are one-man owned, existing for the sole purpose of accessing foreign aid.
• **Weak Financial Base**
Civil society organizations in Sierra Leone have very weak financial resource base. Thus most of them hardly have core programmes. Rather they chase whatever project has money, even where they lack the expertise or mandate to design or implement such projects.

• **Lack of Engagement Skills**
Civil society groups demonstrate huge lack of specific skills for interfacing with and engaging the central state, donors or other civil society groups. This lack of negotiating and lobbying skills usually distract from their abilities to ensure change.

• **General Lack of Information Management Capacities**
Another critical formal civil society deficit relates to information and evidence management. Civil society groups and leaders make very little effort to obtain and understand key state policy documents. Research and investigations are hardly part of CSOs information and evidence gathering agenda. When a CSO chooses to go public with a particular issue, radio, workshops, and newspaper advertorials constitute the narrow spectrum of their skills.

**Summary of Constraints**

• **Legal, administrative and policy drawbacks**
Though the general principles of Sierra Leone’s 1991 constitution quite are supportive of civil society, there are a huge overhang of laws, and administrative procedures from before the war that are not ‘civil society’ friendly. These include The Public Order Act of 1965 that impinge on freedom of association; and the official secrecy provisions in the Civil Service’s General Orders make it very difficult to obtain information from public officials and institutions.

• **Poor Attitudes of State Agents towards civil Society Organizations**
State agents are historically averse to seeing ordinary citizens and their organizations as having rights to engage them on public issues. Public officials see themselves as benefactors and regard the public as beneficiaries. As a result queries from citizens are, at best, seen as superfluous to the state official core functions.

• **Corruption**
Corrupt practice on the part of government officials were reported to be an important factor constraining the influence of civil society on government. There is widespread perception amongst CSOs that there are certain unwritten and corrupt rules that CSOS must follow to access funds from government or influence policy.

• **Limited Space for engagement in policy processes**
There is a widespread perception that space for CSOs to influence policy has been expanding in Sierra Leone. Though Government is indeed attempting to open institutional spaces for State-Civil Society interaction on selected public policy process; the major problem is that Government unilaterally decides what public policy processes that it can grant space to civil society for. Civil society actors suggest that the basis of engagement with the state is often unclear or contradictory. Inclusion in policy processes is unpredictable and civil society often relates with the state on the basis of clienteles or patronage.
Summary of Recommendations

- **Engage Traditional Civil Society Groups**
  Recognize the roles played by neo-traditional and traditional civil society groups in the lives of people and engage these organizations to ensure authentic community participation and input into good governance and development programmes.

- **Civil Society Regulation**
  Work towards the democratization of the legal environment for CSOs work by repealing such laws from the country’s undemocratic past as the Public Order Act, the Treason and State Offences Act and the stifling secrecy provisions in the civil service codes. It is also necessary to simplify and unify the CSOs registration framework. Once this has been done, registration should be made more accessible through decentralization.

- **Policy Engagement**
  In order to maximize civil society involvement in policy processes, support should be given to CSOs to create their own channels for engaging government. This could be done by the avoidance of a ‘grab it all’ disposition amongst civil society groups. Groups could thus be encouraged to develop expertise around particular policy issues and in the process gain recognition and build their own spaces for engagement with the state.

- **Deepening institutionalization**
  Donor and government support to civil society should focus on Institution-building. Such support should be leveraged through reciprocal incentives by government and donors. We note for instance that CBOs are willing to go the extra-mile to qualify to register as an NGO largely to be able to access certain sizes of funds. It is foreseeable that CSOs would similarly react to incentives targeting their level of institutionalization.

- **Addressing weak financial base of CSOs**
  In attending to the problem of CSOs weak financial base, it is recommended that funding patterns be adjusted to allow organizations to retain some funds for sustainability and capacity-building. Such retained quota could be used for investments, gradually building up an endowment.

- **Corruption by State officials**
  A way to fight corruption by government officials in negotiation of development intermediation with CSOs, is to limit the amount of discretion they hold in determining which CSO to invite in a development and process, or which get contracts. Donors’ oversight of programmes hardly extend to the point where CSOs are contracted as implementing partners. And it is exactly at the point where CSOs negotiate contracts as implementing partners that corruption by government officials abounds. It is recommended therefore that donors’ oversight be extended to the point where CSOs are contracted so as to check state officials’ misuse of discretions.
Chapter 1: Country Context

In the early years of independence, Sierra Leone was one of the exemplary cases in Africa of a genuinely open, representative and accountable political system (Hayward 1989). The post-independence experiment with democracy began to suffer minor setbacks when Sir Albert Margai became Prime Minister in 1964 upon the death of Sir Milton Margai, the leader at independence. Executive intrusions into civil and political liberties started (Sesay and Hughes 2005).

Siaka Stevens of the All Peoples Congress (APC) party exacerbated these intrusions when he became Prime Minister in 1968 (Sesay and Hughes 2005). Among the combination of strategies used by Stevens and his party to achieve their political objectives were repression, corruption, clientelism, ethnicity, co-optation and political killings (Sesay 1999).

Sections of Sierra Leonean society that had abilities to counteract autocratic and hegemonic ambitions became targets for control and disempowerment by the Stevens regime. Civil Society became purposively targeted for what Sesay (1999) has called suffocation. Civil Society leaders were given lucrative appointments by the Stevens regime. Civil Society leaders who could not be part of the co-opting game were harassed and repressed. Stevens even used legislation to curb the power and influence of the trade unions (Sesay 1999). The civil war which broke-out in 1991 was the result of the APC’s hegemonic and autocratic rule, closure of political space and predatory politics. (Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report 2005).

Sierra Leone emerged from the ten-year civil war with several governance and development challenges. There is the challenge of recovering or reconstructing state institutions that had decayed during the war or the periods of undemocratic rule. There is the economic challenge of providing basic services, supportive infrastructure, private sector development, and youth employment among others. There is also the challenge of building security and justice systems that would stall a relapse to war and violent conflict.

Civil Society has not been a detached observer in efforts at addressing these challenges. Organizations within civil society have undertaken peace, democracy, good governance and service delivery projects. This crucial importance of civil society in good governance and socio-economic development aspirations is not lost on government. Government recognised in 2002 that even with the required resources, it cannot develop the country on its own. “Government’s essential counterpart must be Civil Society, which has a fundamental participatory role to play in support of reconciliation, security, promoting good governance and policy development” (National Recovery Strategy, 2002-2003, p12). Government’s recognition of the role of Civil Society and commitment of support has again been stated explicitly in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PASCO 2005).

The government’s pursuit of macroeconomic stability, liberalization, and poverty reduction through the Poverty Reduction Strategy (Sierra Leone’s PRSP) has received significant donor support for the country. In delivery support to the country the country’s major donors favor a framework that seeks to achieve wide stakeholder ownership of the poverty reduction strategy, and envisage a role for civil society organizations as partners in development in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policy. The World Bank states that:

*Broad-based Participation of civil society in the adoption and monitoring of the poverty reduction strategy tailored to country circumstances will enhance its sustained implementation* (www.worldbank.org).

Within this framework, there are significant changes occurring in the donor conceptualizations of the roles of CSOs and their place in development processes in Sierra Leone. Discourses have shifted from statements on the role and efficiency of Non Governmental Organization (NGOs) in service delivery towards claims that CSOs can ‘hold government to account’ and create a ‘demand side’ to ensure efficient service delivery by the government.
In 2004 the World Bank’s Sierra Leone Country office started a “Small Grants Program” through which civil society work on policy dialogue, good governance, social inclusion and related issues are supported. An organization, called ENCISS\(^1\), has been established with funding from the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DfID) to develop civil society capacity and help promote dialogue and popular participation in the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy. Engagements like these by the World Bank and DfID are based on the understanding that civil society involvement through consultation and dialogue in the generation, implementation and monitoring of government policy would generally increase their impacts.

### SIERRA LEONE’S SCORE ON GOVERNANCE INDICATORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>SCORE RANGE</th>
<th>YEAR OF SCORE</th>
<th>SCORE</th>
<th>SCORE INTERPRETATION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DEMOCRACY</strong></td>
<td>Polity Score (Type of governance)</td>
<td>-10 To 10</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Scores Range From –10 (Authoritarian) To 10 (Democratic).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Civil Liberties</td>
<td>7 To 1</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Countries rated between 1 &amp; 2.5 are said to be free. Those between 3 &amp; 5 partly free. Between 6 &amp; 7 not free.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political Rights</td>
<td>7 To 1</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Countries rated between 1 &amp; 2.5 are said to be free. Those between 3 &amp; 5 partly free. Between 6 &amp; 7 not free.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Press Freedom</td>
<td>100 To 0</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Countries between 0 &amp; 30 are said to have free press. Those between 31 &amp; 60 have a partly free press. Those between 61&amp;100 have no free press.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voice and Accountability</td>
<td>-2.50 To 2.50</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>-1.35</td>
<td>Scores Range From –2.5 (Worst) To 2.5 (Better).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RULE OF LAW</strong></td>
<td>Political Stability/Lack Of Violence</td>
<td>-2.50 To 2.50</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>-1.26</td>
<td>Scores Range From –2.5 (Highly Unstable) To 2.5 (Satisfactorily Stable).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prevalence Of Law And Order</td>
<td>0 To 6</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Scores Range From 0 (Very Low Prevalence) To 6 (Satisfactory Prevalence).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rule Of Law</td>
<td>-2.50 To 2.50</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>-0.38</td>
<td>Scores Range From –2.5 (Highly Violated) To 2.5 (Highly Upheld).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Government Effectiveness</td>
<td>-2.50 To 2.50</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>-1.6</td>
<td>Scores Range From –2.5 (Highly Ineffective) To 2.5 (Highly Effective).</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CORRUPTION</strong></td>
<td>Corruption Perception Index</td>
<td>0 To 10</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Scores Range From 0 (Highly Perceived As Corrupt) To 10 (Highly Perceived As Not Corrupt).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graft Corruption Index</td>
<td>-2.50 To 2.50</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>Scores Range From –2.5 (Highly Corrupt) To 2.5 (Highly Not Corrupt).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Enhancing the Interaction and Interface between Civil Society and the State to improve Poor People’s Lives (ENCISS)

Figure 1: Source: "The Problems and Prospects of Direct Community Financing" (Sheriff, Mohamed Sidie 2003) based on the UNDP HDI Report, 2003
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature:

From Civil Society for Africa to Civil Society in Africa

There is considerable debate about the meaning of civil society, its relevance, and its conceptual usefulness in the African context (Hutchful 1996; Mark Robinson 1998). Despite the observation that 'civil society' is a notoriously slippery concept (Riddell and Bebbington 1995: 23), there are some approximate ideas and notions that are recurrent in conceptions of Civil Society. These include the idea of voluntary association, public realm and public regarding action, autonomy, and civility. According to Diamond, civil society is the realm of organized social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially regarding, autonomous from the state, and bound by legal order or set of rules (Diamond 1999). These are the ‘good things’ about non-state associational life (or civil society) that must be transported to Africa:

... Civil society is a hitherto missing key to sustained political reform, legitimate states and governments, improved governance, viable state-society and state-economy relationships, and prevention of the kind of political decay that undermined new African governments a generation ago.

This idea of a missing civil society in Africa that must be supplied to the continent to ensure improved governance is very prevalent amongst western academics and development practitioners. Such notions however view the phenomena through a lens that ignores the historical legacy of pre-colonial and even colonial civil society and denies the civil society appellation to organizations which either do not fit with western prescriptions (because they are based on kin or ethnicity or local ‘tradition’) or which western lenses miss altogether (because the forms they take are unfamiliar).

In essence the prevailing notions of civil society for Africa are mainly prescriptive and may have little explanatory power for the complexity of African associational life. To be of value in Africa, the concept of civil society must be adapted in various ways (Maina 1998). Such adaptations should make room for activities and not just organizations, and should move away from a ‘Western’ preoccupation with rights and advocacy to include self-help groups that are organized for personal, economic or social ends. Including informal, self-help activity in our conceptualization of civil society would reveal the existence of active civil society groups with organic connections to African societies and cultures. These groups seek to overcome civic apathy by imbuing their members with agency and a sense of ‘we can do things together with the state, or despite the state.’

Hann and Dunn (1996) argue that civil society has many different forms even in Western societies, but that locally-specific ‘counterpart traditions’ may interact with the Western ‘export’ of a universal idea of civil society. Edwards (1998) develops this line of thinking in a draft paper for the World Bank which sets out a set of oppositions between Western and non-Western ideas about civil society. Rather than current prescription based on Western models, Edwards argues for a more open-ended view of civil society in terms of process, negotiation and as a contested domain.

This is supported by the arguments presented by the Comaroffs (1999, p. 22) who argue that there is a ‘Eurocentric’ tendency to limit civil society to a narrowly defined institutional arena’, running counter to Hegel’s original insistence that the civil sphere of relatedness has its origins in the historical particularities of capitalist production and exchange. Outside this narrowly defined category for example we might find the existence of partisan, parochial, or fundamentalist organizations each with a claim on civil society roles and membership. The narrow view also brings with it the tendency to undervalue the role of kin-based and ethnic organizations in helping to form public opinions and political pressure groups. In Sierra Leone for instance, organizations like the ‘Teguloma’ and Biriwa Descendant Association show how sections of the traditional associational life are beginning to accommodate aspects of modern democratic principles. The possibility for kinship and ascriptive identities to take on both a private and a public face in Sierra Leone contradicts Western assumptions of civil society in which kinship relations are considered to be outside civil society norms.

2 Mende and Limba ethnic associations at home and in the Sierra Leone Diaspora
According to Mamdani (1996), it is unhelpful to argue about universal or local realities and it is instead more useful to analyze the historical processes which have shaped civil society in Africa and the forms these have taken. For example, Mamdani (1996) suggests that the current ‘blinded view’ of civil society prevents us from looking critically at either European or African civil society, and particularly at the complex interrelationship between African societies, the colonial state and metropolitan civil society. Mamdani shows us that this meeting was in reality very ‘uncivil’ and aimed to institutionalize difference between groups of citizens and ethnicized subjects, and between civilized colonists governed by ‘constitutionalism’ and native tribes governed by ‘customary law’.

But such differences, despite their ‘uncivil origins’ have persisted. In Sierra Leone for instance, one notices a distinction between associational life that draws it primary relevance from ascriptive identities and customary norms, and another that draws its discourses from constitutionalism. Ekeh (1975) argues that two publics or societies, rather than one, exist in most parts of Africa: the civic and the primordial. Osaghae suggests that the dividing line between them is best captured by the distinction made in the language of the Igbo between olu oyibo (white man’s) and olu ogbodo (community’s business, which approximates to the primordial public). The olu oyibo, which is conterminous with the state, is seen as undeserving of individual and corporate support (e.g. payment of taxes), lacking accountability and can therefore be plundered to feather private nest (Joseph 1987). By contrast, the olu obodo, which consists mainly of voluntary community associations, traditional guilds and local co-operatives, and what Ekeh (1983) calls emergent social formations (ethnic and hometown development associations) belongs to the community and it is claimed by most ordinary people as their own. Thus members of the olu obodo feel oblige to it and are fiercely protective of its interests, and conduct within this realm is governed by tradition of self-help, self-government and a high degree of accountability.

Such conceptions of associational life de-emphasize the prescriptive ‘civil society for Africa model’ and instead describes ‘civil society in Africa,’ and allows us to analyze civil society motives, pick out their major challenges and discuss ways in which CSOs could be positioned to play vital roles in the social, political and economic governance. This study is informed by the civil society in Africa model.

![REAL AND HYBRID CSOs](image-url)  

**Figure 2**
Chapter 3: Civil Society in Sierra Leone
Traditional, Neo-traditional and Formal Groups

Three distinct categories of civil society are identified in Sierra Leone – traditional Civil Society; neo-traditional Civil Society groups; and the ‘formal western type civil society groups. Each of these categories has a number of sub-types that are discussed below.

3.1 Traditional Civil Society

The vast majority of Sierra Leoneans live in rural areas and their daily lives are in the main governed by indigenous customs and traditions. They are governed by chiefs and organized into patrilineages, sodalities, labor gangs and osusu associations. These structures provide the basis for interaction and inter-mediation between ordinary people and chiefs in the course of meeting local political, economic and other challenges. In essence, whilst the forms of these structures for interaction may be different from western forms of civil society, they nonetheless perform roles that approximate those that civil society groups in the West perform. These groups build the social capital and moral pacts necessary for influencing, countervailing or participating in the political, social and economic governance of local societies.

3.1.1 Sodalities

Sodalities or secret societies are common amongst all the ethnic groups in Sierra Leone. The two most common ones, however, are the Poro for men and Bundu/Sande for women. Most of these sodalities are open for membership to all adult residents in a community. Being a member of the predominant sodality in an area invests one with rights of local citizenship, and increases one’s voice in community affairs. In the provinces, these ‘societies’ (as the sodalities are known) are makers of laws, adjudicators of disputes, and enforcers of customs and traditions. They are also sites for countervailing actions of persons, including chiefs that are perceived as violations of the values and precepts of the local community. Sodalities are governed by taboos and rites that all, including non members, should respect. These taboos are known to members of the community. Violations are sanctioned either through fines openly communicated to the offenders or other punitive measures carried out in the sodalities’ sacred grove.

Sodalities are given tacit support by local as well as national authorities as spaces for adjudicating disputes and enforcing regulations. Issues are even divided into ‘open cases’ that can be dealt with in public – by family/ community elders, religious leader, the chief or local court; and ‘grove cases’ that can only be resolved in the sacred grove of the sodality.
SODALITIES AMONG THE LIMBA

Sodalities amongst the Limba include Gbangbani, Korfor and Nabo for males, Bundo for women, and the Mathoma which can be joined by both sexes. The Gbagbani carries out the rites of passage for males and plays a significant role in community inter-mediation. Its taboos are part of Limba customary law and are enforced as such by elders, chiefs and sodality officials. This sodality is held in awe by persons living in chiefdoms controlled by Limbas. The sodality’s conception of justice, community affairs, conflict and its resolution tend to revolve around ‘yiki’ (honor) and kuluku (shame). It is kuluku to violate the sanctions of the sodality or its officials and members must act to restore its ‘yiki.’

3.1.2 Osusu

An Osusu is a traditional saving scheme. Members contribute an agreed upon amount on a regular basis that is given out to a particular member. This continues until every member of the scheme has received contributions from the group. Osusu encourages people to work hard and fulfil their monetary obligations and enhances cooperation and social capital building in local communities. Through Osusu people build notions about those who are trustworthy, dependable and accountable in their local communities. Osusu schemes are dominated by women.

AN OSUSU GROUP IN MAGBASS, KHOLIFA C/DOM, TONKOLILI DIST.

The members of the scheme are six women and four men. They contribute Le2000 a week and pay this amount collected for the week to one person. So at the end of the week one person gets Le20 000 (about 7 dollars). They continue until every one in the group has received the sum of Le20.

3.1.3 Labor Gangs/Associations (Bembie)

These are voluntary associations formed by community members to support each other on various cultivation tasks. Three categories of such associations could be found. First is the simplest informal agreement among neighbors, friends or kin to work together on various cultivation tasks ‘by turns’.

Here, no financial transaction or formal registration is done, but the host of the day will be expected to provide food. This category is usually small comprising about 4 or 5 farm families. The men do the clearing, land preparation and planting while women do the weeding and assist in harvesting.

The second category of the ‘Bembie’3 (labour club) is more business like, formed at the start of the farming season and comprising young, fit and willing men. The Bembie schedules in advance the number of days it will work in the 3 months intensive labour period. Many farmers prefer the Bembie to the casual daily labourers, because the gang has a good reputation for the large amount of disciplined work they achieve in a day. Peer pressure tends to ensure that everyone works to full capacity. The Bembie therefore ensures access to efficient and sufficient labour for food productivity.

A Bembie could be quite large – comprising 15-30 workers with a musical team that paces the work with praise songs for the strong and motivation for the weak. Over the years, attempts to formalise the Bembie has created the need for the clubs to register with chiefdom authorities. This is because members enter into labour contracts and there may be recourse to the chiefdom court in cases of defaults.

The third type is known as the “Kombi”4. This is a club with formal organisational rules and structures with appointed and sometimes elected officers. Farmers join by paying a small fee. The kombi carries out rotational farm labour and is renowned for its usefulness as a savings club or welfare association.

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1 This is Mende for Labor gang. Plural is Bembiesia. Amongst the Temne, it may be referred to as Kagboto
2 A corruption of the word company
Arrangements are typically handled in periodic meetings. Some kombi meet on Fridays\(^5\) to collect subscriptions to welfare or rotational savings funds.

The Kombi has numerous appointed officials, who handle discipline (fining absentees) and liaison with village authorities. Some kombi groups have written constitutions.

Membership is quite large and may comprise a collection of villages. Primary membership resides within the household and dependants join under the sponsorship of the leader.

Meetings are rotational and at every meeting the host of the day provides food. Kombie may take on several functions e.g. becoming a dance troop for hire. Widespread throughout out rural Sierra Leone, Kombie are primarily co-operative labour mobilisation organisations, and their tendency to take on welfare and developmental functions means that they are important for community driven development.

### 3.2 Neo-traditional Civil Society Group

These are groups with formal organizational structures but where eligibility for membership is based on ascriptive identities (mainly ethnic and locative). Social capital derived from ascriptive identities is utilized by these groups to organize and make political and other claims on behalf of an ethnic group or descendants of a particular area. These organizations are also engaged in assisting members in times of bereavement, wedding, and naming ceremonies. The need to form such groups may arise out of perceptions that if a people with a particular ascriptive identity do not organize themselves into an association they may find it difficult to access certain resources or do things for themselves or their localities. Examples of neo-traditional groups include such ethnicity-lodged social and self-help groups as the Fullah Progressive Union, Ekutay, and Tegloma, and descendants associations like the Biriwa Descendant Union.

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**TEGLOMA**

Tegloma\(^6\) was founded in 1975 in the United States of America by people from the Mende ethnic group in Sierra Leone.\(^7\) A major objective for its formation was to bring together and unify Mende people in that country. These intentions arose from perceptions among Tegloma’s founding members at the time that the Mende ethnic group was not receiving fair treatment from the one-party government of the All People’s Congress party.

One particular event triggered the formation of Tegloma. A Mende man died in Washington D.C. The Sierra Leone embassy there was requested by the man’s family and friends to pay to take his remains to Sierra Leone. Five persons, all of Mende origin, who were driving to the funeral died in an accident. The Sierra Leone embassy also declined to help take their bodies to Sierra Leone for burial. It was discussions around these events that led to the formation of Tegloma.

From only one in 1975, Tegloma today has several state chapters in the United States. The organization has redirected most of her programs to helping Sierra Leone. In the war years (1991-2002) Tegloma at one point made cash contributions to the war efforts of the civil defence militia in the Mende parts of the country, and has been a major contributor to the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP).

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### 3.3 Formal Civil Society

‘Formal’ civil society groups are those which more than the group described above approximate western notions of civil society. Formal civil society groups in Sierra Leone could be categorized according to their major sectors of operations. These include the professional, trade union, human rights, gender, development, and economic sector. Civil Society in each of these sectors could further be divided into national ones led by Freetown based elites and more localized ones. Recently, a new form of civil society group has emerged. This new form transcends the traditional state-civil society divide. It includes such state

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5 Friday (‘Juma’) is a day of rest for many Mende farmers (predominantly Muslims) and could be used to attend to other matters other than farming.

6 ‘Tegloma’ means ‘progress’ in Mende

7 www.tegloma.org
actors as parliamentarians and local councilors forming local council and parliamentary associations to represent their interests and countervail actions of the executive arm of the central government. These types of associations are referred to as hybrid civil society organizations.

3.3.1 Professional Associations/Trade Unions

These are voluntary associations to protect the interest of particular occupations, profession or trade. Through these associations members make collective demands on the state or external parties on matters pertinent to the promotion of their work or profession. These associations are amongst the oldest continually existing civil society groups in the country. Key examples of these associations in the country are The Sierra Leone Bar Association (SLBA), the Sierra Association of Journalists (SLAJ), the Sierra Leone Medical and Dental Association (SLMDA), the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU) and the Sierra Leone Labor Congress (SLLC).

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THE SIERRA LEONE TEACHERS UNION (SLTU)

The SLTU had its origins in 1890 when certificated teachers of Anglican Mission Schools formed the Church Teachers Union. In 1901, it was extended to include other teachers in the colony and renamed the Sierra Leone Teachers Union with a mission to seek the improvement of teachers. In June 1946, teachers in the protectorate formed the Sierra Leone Protectorate Teachers Union (SLPTU) at Senehun, Moyamba. The SLTU and SLPTU merged in 1948 to form the Amalgamated Teachers Union that was soon renamed the Sierra Leone Teachers Union. During the Steven years, the SLTU was largely apolitical and ineffective in pursuing its aims. The SLTU president Mr. Emmanuel Fatorima became enmeshed in the APC politics of patrimonialism and elite co-optation and even became an appointed member of parliament in 1982.

A salient characteristic of trade unions during the Steven years was that leaders once in office could hardly be removed by their members. The SLTU, however, was the first historically entrenched organization to achieve the feat of removing an unaccountable leadership. In 1990, a group of teachers under the leadership of Mban Kabu and Alpha Timbo formed the National Teachers Resolution Committee. The committee planned a successful revolt against their union leaders and installed Mban Kabu and Alpha Timbo as President and Secretary General respectively. The Kabu/Timbo leadership successfully mobilized teachers to renegotiate and improve their conditions through series of industrial actions.

The SLTU has also been involved in efforts to demand democratic governance of the country. In the 1990s the SLTU joined the bandwagon of opposition to the military government and became very vociferous on political issues. It leaders effectively participated in the Bintumani Conferences that demanded the multi-partyism and the democratization of the public realm. During the military nine month interregnum of 1997-8 the SLTU sit down strike during the whole period greatly hampered the junta’s operation as a government.

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3.3.2 The Gender Sector

According to the Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) report, women were greatly marginalized in pre-war Sierra Leone. Illiteracy, morbidity and mortality rates were very high amongst them and women were shut out of political life and economic improvement. The country however also has a long history of women activists and associations geared towards reversing these trends. The first country wide women’s association – the Sierra Leone Women’s Movement was formed in 1951. Prominent women activists in the 1940s, 50s and 60s included Constance Cummings John, Ella Koblo Gulama and Nancy Steele.

Despite the best efforts of these associations, the status of women did not much improve and the war in the 1990s worsened the situation. Newer women associations thus emerged during the war and its immediate aftermath to address the challenges faced by women. These associations were major contributors to efforts

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8 Kabu ran the organization for two terms (1990–96). In 1996 Festus Minah was elected President of the Union. Alpha Timbo continued as Secretary General, resigning only in 1998 when he was co-opted in to the SLPP cabinet.
at ending the war, and at returning the country to democratic civilian governance. Women associations have also been active in efforts at improving women’s access to basic services and advocating for greater participation in the country’s political and economic governance. The major associations geared towards gender equity in the country include the 50/50 Group, the Sierra Leone Association of University Women (SLAUW), the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) and the Sierra Leone Women’s Forum.

**THE SIERRA LEONE WOMEN’S FORUM**

Recommendations made at a seminar on leadership and development organized by the International Association of University Women led to the formation of The Sierra Leone Women’s Forum in February 1994 as a loose federation of women’s group. Its major objective is to ‘promote a platform for building effective alliances amongst women by sharing information and ideas on current and emerging issues of common concern.’

The forum as a coordinating network meets once every month to discuss and take collective action on issues affecting women and children. This networking has ensured that member organizations not only join efforts at countervailing authoritarian state actions (as in the 1996 actions against the NPRC junta), but also demand attention to issues and constituencies that were hitherto marginalized. Such issues and constituencies are mainly gender related and include the education of the girl-child, violence against women, the implementation of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the psychosocial rehabilitation of female victims of the rebel war. Women’s Forum members involved in these include FAWE, the Sierra Leone Association of University Women (SLAUW) and the 50/50 Group.

**3.3.3 Development Sector/Service Delivery Gap Fillers**

Many CSOs in Sierra Leone fall in the category of gap fillers for service provision in sectors or locations where the state is unable or unwilling to do so. During the war government and donors recognized CSOs as indispensable part of service provision. CSOs became crucial actors in the provision of essential services to devastated or depressed areas. CSOs have been involved in provisions of essential services in the DDR process and in the recent government and multi-donor social action project.

**FORUM FOR AFRICAN WOMEN EDUCATIONALISTS (FAWE)**

FAWE –SL was officially launched on March 25, 1995. A chapter of FAWE International, its objective is to enhance the education of women, a fact long neglected in Sierra Leone.

Headquartered in Freetown, the organization runs programs all over the country. FAWE-SL programs have included skills training centres for disadvantaged girls at Grafton and Kenema, a primary school for girls in Freetown, and also rape victim centres in Freetown and Kenema.

Major sources of funding for FAWE-SL have included FAWE International in Kenya; and Office of Transitional Initiatives of the United States Agency For International Development. FAWE-SL members pay subscriptions, but this is negligible as far as expenses for FAWE’s programmes are concerned.

Accountability in the organization is ensured by the reports submitted to the biennial conference of the National Assembly; and also narrative and financial reports made to FAWE International in Nairobi, Kenya, and to the various donor agencies supporting specific FAWE-SL programmes. The National Executive Committee also periodically monitors and evaluates the activities of the National Secretariat.

FAWE is a member of the umbrella body for the development sector of civil society –The Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (SLANGO); the Civil Society Movement and the Women’s Forum.
3.3.4 The Religious Sector

There are two major religions in Sierra Leone – Islam (about 60%) and Christianity (about 30%). The major Muslim associations are the National Council of Imams, the Supreme Islamic Council, the Sierra Leone Muslim Congress and the Federation of Muslim Women Associations of Sierra Leone. The major Christian associations are the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone and the Evangelical Fellowship of Sierra Leone. Whilst these organizations are mainly concerned with promoting the interest of their respective congregations, there has since the war been attempts by both Muslim and Christian organizations to include in their agendas issues and activities related to peace building, reconciliation, democracy advocacy, service provision and development. The most prominent of these new types of organizations in the religious sector is joint Muslim/Christian organization called the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone.

THE INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL OF SIERRA LEONE

The IRC-SL was formed in April 1997 as a chapter of the World Conference on Religion And Peace (WCRP). Its mission is to ensure co-operation amongst the two main religious communities in Sierra Leone (Islam and Christianity) in order to promote a culture of peace and human rights.

Soon after its formation, however, the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) junta overturned the democratically elected SLPP government. The IRC-SL became a voice for the restoration of democracy. It issued statements condemning the coup and was able to prevent the AFRC’s attempts at providing some degree of legitimacy to their regime by co-opting individual religious leaders.

After the restoration of democracy in 1998, the IRC-SL through the support of WCRP and with funding from the United Nations, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Swedish government undertook a series of programmes in human rights education, peace and reconciliation, and the re-integration of children abducted by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The IRC-SL also conducted consultations on the peace process with the Head of State, the RUF leader, paramount chiefs, the SLTU, the National Union of Sierra Leone Students (NUSS) and the Sierra Leone Labor Congress (SLLC). It also held a meeting with cross sections of the RUF/AFRC fighters in the bush. These meetings and consultations facilitated dialogue between the government of Sierra Leone, the RUF and civil society. This ultimately culminated in the Lome Peace talks where the IRC-SL in conjunction with other bodies like ECOWAS, the UN, and the OAU served as facilitators. In recognition of its role in this process, the IRC-SL was made a member of the Lome Peace Accords’ created Council of Elders that had the responsibility of settling disputes amongst the parties to the accords during its implementation.

After the signing of the accords the IRC-SL networked with its constituency (religious leaders and their congregations) to inform them about its provision. The council was also generally involved in promoting peace and reconciliation messages through workshops, radio and television discussions, and sensitization tours.

3.3.5 Human Rights Sector

The growth of human rights organization in Sierra Leone is mainly a reaction to the egregious human rights violations during the war and the attempts both by Sierra Leoneans and non-Sierra Leoneans to put a stop to it and hold accountability those responsible.
As the war ebbed between 1995 and 1998 a couple of civic organizations with human rights mandate emerged. At the end of 1998 the emergent groups formed the National Forum for Human Rights (NFHR), as a coalition to promote human rights protection through “sustainable advocacy, lobbying, training, campaigns, awareness raising, sensitization and networking”.

NFHR’s work is in two broad fronts- demanding accountability for human rights violations and abuses of the war years and addressing the human rights challenges of the day. NFHR has undertaken projects to educate citizens about their rights using radio, printed materials, and community meetings.

NFHR has forty member organizations to date. An Executive Director and support staff run NFHR’s secretariat. NFHR has a Board of Directors that appoints the staff of the secretariat, sets institutional and operational policy, and oversees the work of the secretariat on behalf of the entire membership.

In the exercise of demanding government to meet human rights protection obligations, NFHR issues press releases, and writes letters. The letters and press releases are usually issued when there is a serious violation of human rights on the part of government agencies. NFHR issues press releases to remind government of international conventions and treaties that need ratification and domestication. It issues position statements on topical human rights issues and publishes annual reports which are shared with government and the international community. When the human rights protection obligations of the State require institutional reform NFHR would lobby Government through representation, meetings and public campaigns.

The NFHR led civil society articulation of the idea of the truth and reconciliation process for inclusion in the Peace Accord that ended Sierra Leone’s war. The NFHR also helped establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) working group to channel civil society concerns into the act establishing the TRC. Indeed NFHR was so recognized for its involvement with truth and reconciliation demands that it had representation on the panel that selected the TRC’s commissioners. NFHR was also a member of the steering committee set up by government to do the preparatory work for the kick-off of the TRC.
Chapter 4: Motives for Belonging to Civil Society Groups

Groups Motives and Attributes that Typify Motives

4.1 Traditional Civil Society Groups
Belonging to a group gives a member a sense of belongingness, confers status and gives voice to the individual. In rural areas, not belonging to a major sodality would for instance hinder one from contributing to conversations or issues affecting the locality. In relation to the Osusu and labor gangs, the motives are mainly economic; members pull resources to maximize economic returns.

4.2 Neo traditional groups
Neo traditional groups are organized foremost to protect interest of a people based on a given identity. People who share in a certain identity around which a neo-traditional group is organized may be protected by the work of the group. Neo-traditional groups are channels for making ascriptive demands on the state and mobilizing people who share in the given identity to lay claims on the state and its resources.

4.3 Formal Civil Society Groups
A number of factors motivate people to form or join formal civil society groups. The two major motives are checking or countervailing the state; and accessing donor or state funds. Accessing donor or state funds could further be motivated by desires to access resources for a community or a cause, or for motives that are much more personal and corrupt. Generally however, most civil society groups are formed as reactions to opportunities and threats emerging from state officials or donors. In interviews for this study, members of the Bike Riders Association (BRA) state that their organizations was mainly formed to protect members from the threats, harassment and intimidation of such state agents as the police.

BIKE RIDERS ASSOCIATION

In Sierra Leone, bike riders are persons who ride bike taxis. Most bike riders belong to Bike Riders Association (BRA) in the various towns that bike riding is prevalent.

The most prominent Bike Riders Associations (BRA) are found in Bo, Makeni, Kenema, and Kono. All BRAs have an executive with a chairman as head and such other officials as vice chairman, secretary accident officer and welfare officer. The various BRAs derive revenues from daily subscription and fines paid by members. The BRA coordinate the activities of riders, help them out in case of trouble (accidents and arrest by police) and such other activities as weddings, naming ceremonies for their children, and death.

Though this is changing, bike riders are mostly ex-combatants from all the armed factions during the war. Most of them found the skills they learned during the DDR process non viable and therefore took up bike riding to meet livelihood needs.

There are however many organizations that are formed to access resource from donors or state. Such motives for instance could be gauged by looking at how organizations change their mandates and operating procedures in an effort to access resource from whatever angle.

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9 Other names they are known by in the country are Okadaman, Hondaman and rider.
Grassroots Action for Community Empowerment and Development (GRACED) started as a CBO in 2000 in Bo town, southern Sierra Leone. In 2004 it registered as an NGO. In an interview with the founder/owner he said that the registration as an NGO was influenced by a desire to qualify for larger donor funds. In the hey days of reconstruction and rehabilitation after the end of the war GRACED was an active NGO, working in the areas of health and maternal child care, agriculture, and construction services among other things. The major funding windows for GRACED’s work were European Union’s (EU) rehabilitation and reconstruction project and the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA). EU’s project came to a close. NaCSA also took a new approach to funding its project called Direct Community Financing. In this approach NaCSA no longer needed intermediary CBOs/NGOs to implement its project. Business slowed down for GRACED in 2006/2007. The ‘founder/owner’ of the NGO opened a construction firm with the name GRACED All Ventures operating from the same office as GRACED.

4.4 Organizational Attributes deriving from Motives

Between 2003 and 2006 three major studies on civil society in Sierra Leone were done. All of them scoped or indexed CSOs attributes in relation to their mandate, self regulation, internal democracy, accountability to constituency, functional boundaries and related matters. The motives for which groups are formed reveal their attribute strengths and weaknesses. Socially embedded motives to countervail or check the state breed organizations that are membership-based, and are clear on functional boundaries and mandate. Organizations in this motive category may seek external funds; but members’ contributions are also very important sources of revenue. Professional and trades groups are examples.

Similarly, self-help and neo-traditional groups rely most on membership contributions for their sustainability and work. Although they may be involved in different activities, their score on internal democracy and constituency representation are usually good.

Motives to make demands on resource opportunities hoisted by the state and donors engender its own category or types of organizations and activities. CBOs/NGOs involved in work around water and sanitation, agriculture, community infrastructure, civic education, and so forth are often organized around resource mobilization motives. The CSOs database at MODEP reveals a huge list of CSOs who registered and served as emergency agencies that have implemented various unrelated projects for the Demobilization and Disarmament Reintegration Programme (DDR), NaCSA, and the National HIV/AIDS Secretariat. Each donor funding is greeted by a flurry of registration of new CSOs whose activities end with the lifespan of the donor project. In the CSOs database at the Ministry there is a huge list of defunct organizations that are ‘DDR, NaCSA or HIV/AIDS CSOs’.

A DFID report on civil society in Sierra Leone is categorical that many of these CSOs exist for the purpose of capturing donor funds. CSOs in this motive category falter most on constituency representation, and internal democracy. These organizations have elastic mandates and functional boundaries to undertake any project for which there is donor money. This over reliance on external assistance means that they are constantly fine-tuning their program priorities to the call of resource opportunities at the time. In the absence of external assistance such groups simply go underground or metamorphose into new ones.

10 National Scoping Study of Civil Society, The Civil Society Index, and the DFID framework of support to Civil Society
11 DFID (2002) Sierra Leone: A Framework for DFID support to Civil Society
Chapter 5: The Regulatory and Policy Regime for Civil Society

The Legal and Policy Environment in which CSOs Operate

The 1991 constitution of Sierra Leone anchors citizens’ enjoyment of the right to associational life, under the provisions pertaining to the “recognition and protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms of the individual”\(^\text{12}\). Government’s institutional framework to meet this obligation addresses matters of registration of and support for citizens’ associations and policy mechanisms for monitoring the work of civil society organizations.

5.1 Regulatory framework

There are a number of state-bodies that hold responsibilities to register voluntary, non-profit organizations. The Ministry of Development and Economic Planning (MODEP) registers “Non-Governmental organizations”. The Government’s Policy Regulations for the Operations of Non-Governmental organizations” defines an NGO thus:

“A Non-Governmental organization (NGO) operating within the territory of Sierra Leone shall mean any private, independent, non-profit making and non-political organization, with the primary objective of enhancing the social, cultural and economic well-being of communities. In addition the operations of an NGO shall not have religious, political or ethnic bias.\(^\text{2}\) Key criteria that an organization must meet to be eligible to operate as an NGO include a clear mission statement, accessible and easily identifiable office space, postal address, a bank account, clear administrative structure, a board of Trustees or equivalence and at least three fulltime staff.

MODEP categorizes as CBOs organizations that do not meet its requirements in respect of regular staff, availability of office space, and formal and laid down processes for administrative and financial management. MODEP’s registration is done in the capital city only. NGOs are required to renew their registrations with MODEP annually. For such annual renewal an NGO is required to provide information among others on donor funds received, projects implemented in the past year, tax clearance, annual report, audit reports, list of personnel, tax liabilities, and rented premises.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs registers organizations it categories as “Friendly societies.” Such organizations would include those organized around leisure, credit unions, trade/artisan, and cultural interests. These groups are mostly community-based in operational reach and membership.

The Ministry of Local Government and Community Development also registers CBOs. Local Councils, proscribed in 1973 were revived in 2004 following local government elections. As councils consolidate and spread their functions, some began to provide avenue for registration of CBOs in 2007. Councils at the time had no such function devolved to them. Local council officials however interpreted section 20F of the Local Government Act, 2004 as a source of powers to register CBOs. Section 20F gives councils functions to “coordinate and harmonies the execution of programmes and projects promoted or carried out by public corporations, other statutory bodies and non-governmental organizations”.

In registering CSOs the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs, and the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development ask primarily for list of members and board of trustees or advisors, bank account, and articles of association. Like MODEP, the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs and the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development require organizations registered with them to annually renew their registrations. Unlike MODEP however these ministries do not require from CSOs submissions on projects undertaken, financial management, donor funds, and related issues.

\(^{12}\) 1991 Sierra Leone Constitution
The Ministry of Youths and Sports registers youth organizations. “A youth organization is one formed by youths, and run by youths to serve youth interest or constituency.” Youth groups registered with the Ministry of Youths and Sports are mostly associated around leisure/social agenda, income generation and community development.

The office of the Registrar General registers civil society organizations as non-profit companies, limited by guarantee without shares. Many umbrella associations, and non-governmental organizations, professional associations are registered under this window.

There is no law in Sierra Leone that directly compels citizens to register civic collectives. This means that it is not illegal to run an unregistered non-profit, organization. And indeed, there are many citizens associations operating in the open that are not registered. When citizens choose to register their association, it is completely in response to incentive regimes leveraged by the state, donors, or such external entities. Registration brings recognition and attestation of existence by the state. The state itself and donors make this recognition and attestation of existence a pre-condition for transacting business or relationship with a CSO.

In the incentives regime leveraged by the state for registration of CSOs are opportunities for duty-free concessions, tax exemptions and contracts. For donors and other external entities it is simply their refusal to do business with unregistered groups that serves as incentives for citizens to register their collectives. This means that where the nature of a group’s transactions hardly requires interaction with the state or donors or such other external entities, that group could choose to ignore registration of its identity.

MODEP’s requirements for registration of an organization are considered most difficult of all the other agencies requirements. Consequently, many organizations that were registered with MODEP since it assumed registration responsibilities have sought registration cover elsewhere, particularly the office of the Registrar General and the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children’s Affairs.

5.2 Policy framework for support for CSOs work

Instituting a policy framework for state declared support to enhancing CSOs is a recent development in Sierra Leone, dating back to no earlier than 2000. The National Recovery Strategy, 2002-2003 clearly articulated that “Government’s essential counterpart must be civil society, which has a fundamental participatory role to play in support of reconciliation, security, promoting good governance and policy development”. Government’s recognition of the role of civil society and commitment of support for it has also been expressed in its Poverty Reduction Strategy paper (PASCO 2005). The PRSP is government’s longer-term policy framework for attending to poverty, economic development and good governance obligations.

In the PRSP, Government recognized the work that NGOs were doing to foster peace and reconciliation since the end of the war in 2002. An undertaking is made that civil society will be involved in programmes for the consolidation of peace. Government called for continuous efforts and specific actions required on the part of all Sierra Leoneans to provide the peaceful enabling environment needed for among other things the strengthening Civil Society.

The Sierra Leonean state also is a signatory to the New Partnership for Africa Development (NEPAD). The NEPAD agreement generally supports civil society participation in monitoring government performance, particularly in relation to the African Peer Review Mechanism.

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13 Interview with Anthony Koroma, Director of Youths, Ministry of Youths
Chapter 6: Civil Society and the State in Policy Interactions

CSOs in Policy Generation and Oversight

Civil Society is seen as holding tremendous promise for checking authoritarianism, improving public realm accountability, popular participation, and the rule of law among others in the pursuit of good governance. Thus CSOs are increasingly supported today by donors to engage in dialogue and advocacy with government over key areas of policy as a means of widening public debate and rendering decision-making processes amenable to greater citizen participation and oversight.

A number of opportunities exist for civil society to influence policy generation and implementation in Sierra Leone. The country’s political system draws great legitimacy from a discourse that presents it as democratic and participatory. The country’s constitution allows for the operation of a multi-party participatory system of governance and Freedom of expression. This is having institutional expression through the large numbers of political parties, civil society groups, private newspapers and community radio stations.

Indeed, in practice Government is demonstrating some level of willingness to access citizens’ opinions on policy issues. There are such initiatives as the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper Sectoral Committees, National Youth Council, and Anti-Corruption Commission Community Relations Committees (Jay, Richards, and Williams 2003). The decentralization programme is also widening the space for State-Civil Society dialogue on public policy and public interest probity demands, and increased inclusiveness (World Bank 2004 and Jay, Richards and Williams 2003).

Also the state now largely sees itself and wants non state actors and donors to see it as a democracy. The democratic discourse of the state serves as a defense against threats of reversal to the ‘bad days’ of military dictatorship, war and one party rule; and as an assertion of the country’s aspirations for participatory, accountable and transparent governance that put the greatest premium on the welfare of its people. Civil society discourses in the country draw their strength from this ‘super-discourse’ of the state.

Also, civil society self legitimation discourses are full of references to civil society’s historic stance against the NPRC, RUF and AFRC. They believe that the present regime, as ‘beneficiaries’ of their stance, should be grateful to them. Donor and international NGO discourses in workshops, seminars and sensitization tours have also served to ignite and sustain conceptions of civil society as change agents.

There has been since the war an impressive growth in the number of civil society organizations and the spectrum of their concerns. There as been an attendant expansion of engagement methodologies from an most exclusive reliance on demonstrations and strikes to ones that now also include organizing public forums for public officials to explain their actions, conduct of opinion polls, putting out press releases, organizing seminars and radio discussions, and publishing reports on specific issues.

However, the influence of a civil society group on state processes in Sierra Leone is a function of its geographical location and the biography of its top personnel. Groups in Freetown have greater influence than those in the provinces and those headed by persons with one or another of the following biographical details: university degree, age 35 and above, school mate or client of the significant public official - have greater influence than those without.

But whilst some civil society groups may be more influential than others, civil society generally has very low influence on policy processes. This low influence could partly be explained by a number of factors deeply embedded in socio-historical trajectory of state-civil society relationship in the country.

Two systems of governance are discernable in Sierra Leone –the traditional and the modern. The public discourse of the modern system emphasizes legal rational processes and the traditional mode privileges customary informal modes of operations. Sierra Leoneans grew up in the shadow of these two contrasting framework for mediating the relationship between them and those in public authority positions. Those who get appointed or elected to authority positions bring these contrasting notions to the state bureaucracy. Civil society activists also bring these contrasting notions into their civil society work. In their public discourses,
whether in seminars, in the media, or with donors, civil society actors emphasize legal rational and other emerging notions from the West. But these break down the closer they are to implementing their programs. Thus the public discourse of both civil society and state actors looks hollow to each other. However, though seen as hollow, engaging civil society is an emerging legitimating criteria for state processes; the performance legitimizes.

Civil society engagement with the state in Sierra Leone has historically been a combination of co-operation and conflict that changes from one moment to another. The changes from cooperation to conflict occur in relation to the following: type of regime controlling the state (is it a military or civilian one?); the regime’s (violent or co-optational etc) strategy of engagement with civil society actors; the issues at stake; and the ethno-geographical identity of the leading civil society activists.

During the administration of Albert Margai (1964-7), the Sierra Leone Bar Association and the Fourah Bay College Student Union were at the fore-front of opposition to the regime’s attempt at constricting the political space, but the APC’s violent method was to transform the Bar Association into an apolitical one, to such an extent that even after the demise of the APC it could still not state a position during the illegal and brutal AFRC interregnum in 1997. The National Union Of Sierra Leone Students (NUSS), especially its most visible branch, the Fourah Bay College Student Union did not become apolitical, but then it oscillated between support for the regime and opposition to its structural atrocities on alternate years; radical confrontational student leaderships and co-operational ‘bald-head’ ones, as student themselves put it, succeeding each other. Similar patterns of opposition or support for democratic opening and/or dictatorial closure of the public realm are inscribed in the history of such other civil society groups like the SLTU and the SLLC.

Civil society-state engagement has also been a function of the nature of ethno-regional composition of those at the helm of the state and those at the helm of civil society. In the 1960s, persons from the south and east (supporting SLPP) were pitched against persons from the west and north (supporting APC) for political supremacy. Civil society – The Sierra Leone Bar Association (SLBA), the Academic Staff Association of the university and independent press houses - then was controlled by persons from the Freetown area and civil society was very oppositional. Its public discourses were full of legal rational arguments –against corruption; republicanism; one party; and media repression. But the subtext is desire for change of personnel at the helm of the state. By the 1970s, persons from the north were in control of the state, and there was noticeable silence from the Bar Association and Academic Staff Unions. (These associations might have also been afraid of the APC’s penchant for violence, ethno-regional affinity with those at the helm made co-optation and silence easier)

By the late 1990s, a small northern clique that coalesced around a neo-traditional group called Ekutay was at the helm of the state. This alienated all major ethno-regional blocks in the country. Civil society, utilizing the political discourses made possible by the end of the cold war condemned this narrowing of the political space and called for multi-party democracy. A multi party constitution was promulgated; but its implementation was cut short by the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) coup.

The NPRC coup and the war in Sierra Leone unsettled the capacities of time –honored structures – the extended family, clientelism etc – for influencing the course of events. New structures, groups, processes had to be created to respond to issues created by the war and the NPRC regime. The leading figures in the NPRC were young soldiers, this had important effects on the formation of civil society groups during the war – most were formed or led by hitherto marginalized social categories–women and young men. There was a general overturning of older authority figures. The issues civil society groups addressed included concrete ones like security and food for people, and others like human rights, good governance and peace.

As the war continued, a rift occurred between the armed youth who controlled the junta and the unarmed youth who controlled civil society. An alliance was formed between civil society and political parties. Political parties were controlled by elderly males, and when this alliance succeeded in ending the rule of the armed youths, the elders moved into position of state authority. Younger persons with strong patronage ties with these new statesmen were placed in such newer institutions as the National Commission for

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14 Most of the current leading non-service delivery CSOs were formed by women young men during or immediately after the NPRC
Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, and Resettlement (NCRRR) and the DDR. The vast majority of young persons and women however remained in civil society.

This generational and gender divide between those in state positions of authority and those in civil society is one of the structural factors constraining the influence of civil society. Civil society are the ‘pikin (children)’ and ‘women’ talking.’

The issues at stake have also influenced the relationship. Civil society has historically been enlivened by regime change. In the 1960s, it was at the forefront of agitation for regime change from the SLPP to the APC, and then from the Military to the APC in 1968. In the mid 1990s it was at the centre of calls for regime change from the NPRC to a civilian government and also from the AFRC to the SLPP. In all these civil society formed alliances with political parties. In the 60s it was with the APC, in the 1990s it was with the UNPP and SLPP and latter with the SLPP. Its relative weakness in the 70s, the early 80s and in the present stems from its relative unimportance to political parties.

Two things are important here: civil society influence has also been a function of their ability to aggregate issues; deliver the vote, or disturb the ‘peace.’ In the 60s civil society was influential because it could aggregate issues, influence opinion, and deliver the vote. The same was also true in the mid 90s when civil society aggregation of issues was important to political operatives seeking to convince the international community to support them. This however, may be unimportant now. Civil society is not as necessary to turn (or not turn the international community’s attention now towards the country as it was in the mid 90s.)

The last ten years have been growth years for civil society. Hitherto grand membership based organizations like the SLTU, SLCC, SLBA and student unions had been at the helm of civil society state engagement. The topography is wider today; and this has broadened the option of the state to choose the organization it wants to work with. And the organizations it chooses are mainly those that are less threatening or whose personnel have biographical and ethno-regional linkages with pre-eminent state personnel.

As pointed earlier civil society thinks government should be grateful to it for ushering them in to power. Being grateful here takes two forms –either the government take on board the issues they are advocating; or take their persons on board. Taking the issues on board has proved much more difficult than taking the persons on board. Taking persons on board fit more easily into established patterns of co-optation than taking issues on board.

But there is currently a crisis of co-optation in the country. The state just cannot co-opt the large number of civil society activists or ‘posturists’ out there. Moreover, external resources for civil society work in the country have diluted the state’s monopoly and strategic use of the carrot to entice civil society actors.

Also important is the reduction of the state intimidatory capacities. The war made state authorities a little bit afraid and ordinary citizens a little bit bolder. This is especially so in urban centres like Freetown, Bo, Kenema and Makeni. Thus the state cannot prevent civil society activists from ‘talking the talk.’ They can dismiss it, but they cannot repress it. But then civil society also mainly talks, talk and talk. The talk may be organized – workshops, seminars, reports, and increasingly on radio – but they hardly influence government policy.

Some of factors responsible for civil society very limited influence on government policy are internal to civil society. First, civil society lacks the knowledge base, technical expertise and information capacity to fully and effectively engage the state on many issues. Second the fact that they could not manage themselves properly constrains them as credible partners. Third, though there has been a rise in consultations with civil society, it is a mix bag as to whether their inputs are taken seriously. Many civil society groups do not just know where to tap to get their inputs implemented. This may have to do with the large number of institutions – government; donors etc - that must be engaged to get their inputs implemented. Civil society does not have the skills and resource to follow their inputs right down to adoption and implementation. Also because of civil society fragmentation, it is just too difficult to aggregate their concerns and deal with them. This is exacerbated by the fact that there exists no agreed legitimate framework or process for dealing with civil society. Hence the state chooses at random the group it wants to consult (mainly those that are ‘in line’) and says they have consulted with civil society.

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Civil groups are also failing to impact on state reform processes because they often lack strong evidence, effective information/research and technical expertise to back up their claims. Thus it is very easy for government that already has a disposition to limit civil society input to dismiss their claims.

Also, because the financial foundations of most civil society are weak, they tend to jump from one issue to another in search of money. Thus they have very little specialization on any one issue. As a result their inputs are uninformed.

Participation in the planning for the decentralization and PRSP process by civil society was limited. The task force set up to make recommendations on the decentralization process included only one civil society member out of a total of twenty two. In the task force’s district level consultations the consensus was that local council chairpersons be directly elected; that the elections be held on a non partisan basis and that a quota of seats in the local councils be reserved for women youths and the disabled. None of these recommendations found their way into the parliamentary act that re-established elected local councils in the country. The committee set up to prepare the PRSP also did not include representatives from civil society. The committee did make nation-wide consultations, but civil society input during the aggregation process was nil. After the aggregation they were sensitized and asked to validate the document. Hardly any changes were made after the validation exercises.

The decentralization process and the PRSP have however opened up great opportunities for civil society to influence events and demand accountable government. For instance, the PRSP could be an advocacy tool in the hands of civil society; this however is not being utilized by them. The decentralization process open up spaces for civil society to input into local council plan and hold council officials accountable, the groups are however not taking advantage of these entry points. This may be a function of the current (early) stage of the decentralization process; so the full range of its potential cannot be supplied by the councils nor demanded by civil society. For instance the councils may be giving information that is not needed and civil society does not have the strength to demand accountability.

Also public officials may seek to curtail civil society influence by demanding from the groups what the groups are demanding from them (i.e the public officials). Where civil society cannot do this (and most of them cannot) then their influence is curtailed. For example in Makeni, the town council says they have endeavored to present their budget to civil society, but civil society is not presenting theirs for public scrutiny.

Civil society is constrained by a hollow sense of citizenship, accountability and state engagement. As a result of decades of dictatorial rule Sierra Leoneans had no opportunity to socialize citizenship habits. In those periods questioning governments actions or policies or demanding it to account was met with harassment, blackmail, co-optation, and dismiss, among other responses. Save for sporadic violent demonstrations against price hikes, and conditions of service bargaining by trade unions citizens came to accept that government cannot be questioned.

This is changing. People are mastering Universalist public discourses, but the magnet of particularizing or individualizing relationships with public officials is still strong. It has been part of the historical repertoire of relationship with public officials and people reckon that it is still useful. Particularizing these relationships however truncates notions of entitlement based on citizenship right; it transforms citizens into clients, into mendicants.

Civil society groups very often resign to pessimism that nothing will come out of their demands for change, or they resort to ad hoc, unstructured, and even violent ways. The refrain “how for do” and “God dae” marks the zenith of despair that there is nothing citizens can do influence government.
Civil society organizations face a number of constraints and challenges. Three sources of these limitations could be distinguished: limitation emanating from their relationships with the state; limitations coming from within civil society; and limitations emanating from the general socio-cultural context within which they operate.

7.1 Constraints Emanating from the State

The major constraints for civil society that emanate from the state include the following:

7.1.1 Legal, administrative and policy drawbacks

The general principles of Sierra Leone’s 1991 constitution quite are supportive of civil society. The constitution allows for a multi-party system of governance, guarantees fundamental human rights and essential freedoms of association, assembly, expression and information and provides considerable protections for civil society. There is however, from more than three decades of one-party and military dictatorships, a huge overhang of laws, and administrative procedures that are not ‘civil society’ friendly. For instance, the 1965 Public Order Act which makes libel a criminal offence, seriously restricts freedoms of expression and use of the media. The Public Order Act of 1965 also impinges on freedom of association by requiring persons to seek a government permit from the Police before holding meetings, assemblies or public demonstrations. The government has on many occasions, refused requests from organizations to hold public demonstrations. Generally, the permit requirement for holding meetings or assemblies is not imposed but the fact that it is in the law book means that it could be used at anytime. The Treason and State Offenses Act of 1965 and official secrecy provisions in the Civil Service’s General Orders make it very difficult to obtain information from public officials and institutions.

Another major constraint from the general legal, policy and regulatory framework is that the goals of regulations are mainly to control rather than facilitate CSO work. CSOs see the NGO regulatory policy has having coercive intent. Government officials themselves see the NGO policy as been an instrument to “control” NGOs.

Government has made pronouncements that it will give support to civil society. These statements of support for civil society are commendable. The policy commitments are critically relevant as reference points in negotiating civil society’s status with government. But the policy commitments of Government in respect of supporting Civil Society however have a huge short-fall. Specific things that government would do to involve civil society or support it are not given.

7.1.2 Poor Attitudes of State Agents towards civil Society Organizations

State agents are historically averse to seeing ordinary citizens and their organizations as having rights to engage them on public issues. Public officials see themselves as benefactors and regard the public as beneficiaries. As a result queries from citizens are, at best, seen as superfluous to the state official core functions. In many cases, such queries and demands are perceived as acts of insubordination that must not be tolerated. In other words, queries from civil society groups and respect for such rights are historically not part of the repertoire of interaction between public officials and the public.

7.1.3 Corruption

Corrupt practice on the part of government officials were reported to be an important factor constraining the influence of civil society on government. There is widespread perception amongst CSOs that certain unwritten rules must be followed if they to access funds from government or influence policy. Service delivery CSOs for instance must play by such rules as giving kick backs to government officials for contracts awarded to them. Those who refuse to play by these ‘unwritten rules’ are often excluded,
penalized or even threatened. Such practices weaken the moral standing of many CSOs and render them easily dismissible when making demands for better political and socio-economic governance of the country.

7.1.4 Limited Space for Engagement in Policy Processes
There is a widespread perception that space for CSOs to influence policy has been expanding in Sierra Leone. Government is indeed attempting to open institutional spaces for State-Civil Society interaction on selected public policy process. The major problem however is that Government can chose to unilaterally close such spaces. Government, in fact unilaterally decides what public policy processes that it can grant space to civil society for. Civil society actors suggest that the basis of engagement with the state is often unclear or contradictory. Inclusion in policy processes is unpredictable and civil society often relates with the state on patron-clientelist basis.

In some policy processes civil society involvement in service delivery is a prerequisite for their participation in policy formulation. In the agriculture sector, for example, farmers that are not members of the state established Agricultural Business Units (ABUs) do not have the same influence in policy process as farmers in the ABUs. CSOs that are not in service delivery are constrained from effectively mobilizing and engaging in policy generation. But then even with service delivery CSOs, their involvement in corrupt practices, as highlighted above generally constrain their moral voice when engaging with state officials.

7.2 Constraints coming from within civil society

7.2.1 Low Levels of Institutionalization
Though the country has hundreds of formal civil society groups; most of them are not institutions. This is not to say that institutions are a priori good. Institutions can be bad. Nonetheless, institutions have greater potentials for organizational autonomy, coherence of mandate, functional boundaries and reliability of procedures and adherence to them. Organizations without these features have constrained capacities for exacting accountability. And these are the features that most civil society groups lack in the country.

Most formal civil society groups do not have administrative and financial rules. A huge number of civil society organizations in Sierra Leone are one-man owned, existing for the sole purpose of accessing foreign aid. A DFID report (2003) on civil society in Sierra Leone has called them ‘ghost’ organizations. They are always stretching mandates and functional boundaries to undertake any project for which there is donor money (Sesay and Hughes, 2005).

7.2.2 Weak Accountability
Traditional civil society groups like the Osusu and Labour gangs, and membership based ‘formal’ civil society have clearer mandates and generally, display greater intra group accountability than non-membership based urban civil society groups. A major problem, however, is that the greater their access to donor funds and state institutions, the less accountable they themselves become to their own members.

In other words, there tends to be an inverse correlation between intra-organizational accountability and access to donor funds. The greater the organization’s access to the state and donors, the more its internal mechanisms for ensuring accountability and control of their key personnel tend to break. The risks for personalization and informalization of civil society rules and resources are therefore greatest at the point where they should more positioned to exact accountability. The problem may be related to lack of absorptive capacities by civil society organizations. Thus resources beyond the organization’s absorptive capacities are personalized and misused.

7.2.3 Weak Financial Base
Also, civic organizations in Sierra Leone have very weak financial resource base. Weakness here is related more to lack of regular financial input than to the amount of money civil society groups irregularly get. It is more like too much money at one time, and too little money at another time. Too much money leads to absorptive capacity problems, too little money leads to unsustainability of programmes.
7.2.4 Lack of Engagement Skills

Civil society groups demonstrate huge lack of specific skills for interfacing with and engaging the central state, donors or other civil society groups. Civil society engagements with the state on many issues are almost always driven by external support opportunities. There is always an external hand that helps to articulate entry point opportunities. What this means is that many other issues requiring civil society attention may lay unattended in the absence of external support opportunities.

Even when civil society groups have identified a particular issue and are engaging the state on it, lack of negotiating and lobbying skills usually distract from their abilities to ensure change. Civil society groups very often resign to pessimism that nothing will come out of their accountability demands, or resort to ad hoc, unstructured, and uncivil ways. In some cases physical confrontation with agents of the government has been part of civil society’s negotiation of change in their social accountability demands.

7.2.5 General Lack of Information Management Capacities

Another critical formal civil society deficit relates to information and evidence management. Civil society groups and leaders make very little effort to obtain and understand key state policy documents. Research and investigations are hardly part of CSOs information and evidence gathering agenda. When a CSO chooses to go public with a particular issue, radio, workshops, and newspaper advertorials constitute the narrow spectrum of their skills.
Chapter 8: Recommendations

8.1 Utilizing civil society forms outside the formal

Since most Sierra Leoneans live in rural areas, it is recommended that their traditional expression of civil society be accommodated by government and donors. These traditional expressions of civil society have been mapped out in the study as including Osusu, labour gangs, and sodalities. Notice must be taken of these formations in the design of development and good governance programmes; and steps should be taken to consult them as to how to get their input and participation in these programmes. Already, there have been some attempts by government, international and national development organizations to go beyond some of the modern forms of civil society in the various direct community financing programmes. Village Development Committees and Project Management Committees have for instance been created by many organizations as conduits for agricultural input support, rehabilitation of community structures or provision of social services. However, whilst these programmes have clearly moved closer towards direct community participation, they fall short of utilizing indigenous structures that people know how to utilize to set priorities, enhance participation, deliver local services and exact accountability.

8.2 Civil Society Regulation

This study recommends firstly, that in order to maximize the legal environment for CSOs work, certain laws from the country’s undemocratic past have to be repealed. Such laws as the Public Order Act, the Treason and State Offences Act in particular impinge much of CSOs work. It is precisely in recognition of this that civil society itself is spearheading campaign against the Public Order Act, for instance. Civil society organizations are also calling for the enactment of a Freedom of Information Act. These campaigns have to be given support by both government and the international community as part of an agenda for enhancing CSOs work.

Regarding a regulatory framework for CSOs, it is recommended, in line with a National Civil Society Scoping Study by ENCISS (2007) that there be a single registration authority for CSOs. From interviews and FGDs for this research a single registration authority has support amongst CSO. However, such registration authority must be accessible across the country. Registration process should be simple and time friendly. A simple registration authority could still do categorization of organizations on the basis of roles and set different regulatory regimes. A regulatory requirement that development and service delivery NGOs share proposals with MODEP can certainly not be necessary for “friendly societies”. A CSO regulatory framework must be built on among others the following: facilitation of CSOs work, protection of the public, and protection of members in an association. This is to keep the regulatory regime as narrow as possible. A case has been made that registration of CSOs be decentralized and devolved to Local Councils. A counter case has however been presented that devolution of registration of CSOs to Local Councils may not be the best thing to do. Groups like Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) and the Center for Democracy and Human Rights (CDHR) have argued that they will never receive fair treatment from Local Councils. This is so because their works around public office accountability and human rights has often put them in conflict with the Local Councils.

8.3 Space for CSOs in policy processes

In order to maximize its involvement in policy processes, it is recommended that civil society engineers its own channels for engaging government. Such channels have to be structured and institutionalized. Civil society will continue to engage government in policy discourses through government created spaces. But the risk of unilateral closure of such spaces by government has to be mitigated by the availability of spaces owned and controlled by CSOs.

As cited earlier there is again the constraint that government at times manipulates its invitation of CSOs into policy processes. In mitigating this, it is recommended that different CSOs create ‘expertise identity’ around different policy issues. Where individual CSOs specialise their involvement in a particular
development/governance matter, it is expected they would accumulate recognition and expertise around that matter over time. Government will find it difficult to say that it doesn’t know who to engage in a particular policy matter.

8.4. Deepening organizations institutionalization

Institution-building in organizations, it is recommended, should be a focus of government and donor support to civil society. The DFID supported ENCISS project envisages doing what would amount to institution-building in CSOs. Here, ENCISS plans to help organizations develop coherent mandates, systems for information flow between organization and its board or constituency, and sound governing instruments among others. Activities like these have never been part of the support portfolio to CSOs. And organizations falter on internal accountability, constituency representation, and related issues principally in respect of their falter on institutionalization. In addition to such support like the one ENCISS envisages, CSOs institutionalization should also be leveraged through reciprocal incentives by government and donors. We note for instance that CBOs are willing to go the extra-mile to qualify to register as an NGO largely to be able to access certain sizes of funds. It is foreseeable that CSOs would similarly react to incentives targeting their institutionalization score.

8.5 Addressing weak financial base of CSOs

In attending to the problem of CSOs weak financial base, it is recommended that funding patterns be adjusted to allow organizations to retain some funds for sustainability and capacity-building. Such retained quota will be used for investments, gradually building up an endowment. The critical issue this recommendation seeks for address is that of the near 100% reliance of most CSOs on donors. CSOs that are not membership-based cannot exist without donor funds or fees for contract services rendered.

It is the case in the West that CSOs have in their resource pool corporate, individual or family endowments, fund-raising through sale of eservice or goods, proposal funding, membership subscriptions, and government subventions among others. CSOs in Sierra Leone could also expand their resource pool to include some of these. But for this, capital has to be accumulated. It is in this respect that the recommendation is made that funding patterns be adjusted to allow surplus accumulation by CSOs for investment.

8.6 Corruption by State officials

A way to fight corruption by government officials in negotiation of development intermediation with CSOs, is to limit the amount of discretion they hold in determining which CSO to invite in a development and process, or which get contracts. Development processes to which CSOs have been invited to participate in Sierra Leone have been the DDR, NaCSA and the Sierra Leone HIV/Aids (SHARP) programmes. These are all donor funded programmes. Donors’ oversight of these programmes hardly extended to the point where CSOs were contracted as implementing partners. And it is exactly at the point where CSOs negotiate contracts as implementing partners that corruption by government officials abounds. It is recommended therefore that donors’ oversight be extended to the point where CSOs are contracted so as to check state officials’ misuse of discretions.
List of Interviews

- Gibril M. Bassie, Director, Coordination of Active Peace and Empowerment. March 2007
- Joseph Davies, Project Officer Association for People’s Empowerment, March 2007
- Aiiah Morsay, Director Community Action for Rural Development, March 2007
- Harold L. Tucker, Director, Grassroots Action for Community Empowerment and Development, March 2007
- Mohamed L. Mansaray, Community Action for Rural Empowerment (CAREM), March 2007
- Patrick Adu, Coordinator, MRD, March 2007
- Fallah Bockarie, Programme Officer, Kailahun District Development Organization, March 2007
- Maxwell V. Kemokai, Project Officer, Network Movement for Justice and Development, March 2007
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- Kenema-March 2007
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