

Meaningful democracy presupposes the ability of all people to pull their limited resources, to form and develop ideas and programmes, put them on the political agenda, and act to support them. For it is in the learning life of associations, organisations and movements that common problems, which reverberate first in individual life histories are distilled and transmitted in amplified form to the public sphere.

**GTZ/UNECA PROGRAMME ON
CIVIL SOCIETY AND POLITICAL CONSENSUS BUILDING**

Foundations, development and potential of
CIVIL SOCIETY IN AFRICA:
AN ASSESSMENT AND STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE¹

Volume I
CIVIL SOCIETY:
A THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT

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Report prepared as part of the
Assessment of Lessons Learned for Popular Participation in
Political Consensus Building and the Current State and Potential of CSOs in Africa:
Foundations of new Strategies and approaches

¹ This is a report presented to GTZ as part of a contractual fulfilment. It is made of four volumes constructed from numerous papers, publications and workshop reports that are attached to the bibliography. Volume I is a theoretical construct for civil society development in Africa, volume II is the context of state-society relations, volume three is an analysis of the influence of the project on political transition in Africa, volume four is the strategic perspective and way ahead.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a vast and growing, if recent, literature on associational life in Africa. Much of this literature is an important and much needed corrective to the afro-pessimism prevailing in policy circles in the West. Having despaired of revamping the supposedly derelict African state, researchers and some policy makers have averted their gaze to social movements and groups, optimistic that these, if re-invigorated, may organically lead to stronger and more democratic states in the continent. Whereas these movements were once perceived as the touchstone of democratic transition and consolidation, their brief has been widened. Researchers and policy makers alike see them as the bar bingers of development and the solution to the deep poverty that afflicts the continent. Can these movements and groups, loosely termed civil society, carry the large brief cut out for them? This work accepts, as does most of the literature that civil society is crucial to democratic deepening and poverty reduction but it sounds a more skeptical note and deprecates the carnival air surrounding much of the recent discussion of civil society as the midwife of democracy and development. It argues that the complexities of associational life in Africa are less elegant, and seamier, than much of the literature cares to admit.

To engender an understanding of and the strengthening of the Civil Society it is imperative that we grapple with issues and research related questions as follows: *Given the predatory nature of the state in Africa, shouldn't studies focus as decisively on the state as a continuing variable in the increasing de-institutionalisation and weakening of civil society?* On the other hand, *how can high trust organisations such as the Church be used in further efforts to strengthen African civil society without undermining the emergence of a genuinely pluralist society?* There are more to this...

1. Given the inability of the political sector to articulate anti-poverty friendly policies, how can civil society organisations be enhanced to facilitate networking and campaign designs around issues of basic rights, such as, education, food, water, shelter, health in the context of the hostile political and economic environment prevailing in the country? What kind of economic and political reforms need to institute to engender a strong and vibrant Civil Society realm?
2. What kind of legal framework needs to be instituted to protect both lending financial institutions and the small borrowers? How can social credit institutions in the rural areas be integrated with existing financial institutions to enhance their financial management capacities and resources? How can the propensity to save among the rural poor, which remains largely untapped, and outside the national efforts to mobilise resources be enhanced? What are the modes of differentiation within specific civil society organisations

and between the traditional civil society organisations and modern civil society organisations and how can they be harnessed for purposes of strengthening the Civil Society? i.e. given the many attempts by civil society organisations such as trade unions and hawker organisations to engage the state (in some cases successfully), what explains underlying successes and failures in these attempts and how can they be consolidated?

3. How can the process of networking (between urban and rural based civil society organisations) and apportioning of responsibility as per comparative advantage while stressing unity in diversity be engendered to facilitate a meaningful engagement of the state? How can rural based civil society organisations' ability to bargain for power, organise, advocate and articulate their Economic interests and if possible influence state institutions for policy making be facilitated? How do women organisations in urban areas (given their atomistic nature) differ from their rural counterparts and how can their issues be consolidated in the emergently polarised political environment?
4. Who are the key grant makers in the civil society realm and what is their motivation, nature of activities and potential for democratisation and economic development? How do they measure output from these organisations? Given the entrenchment of vested interest in the economy how will such interest be positive enticed to embrace meaningful economic and political reforms without threatening the survival of the nation state? How can civil societies help in facilitating the construction of regional institutions that can also help in facilitating cross border movements, setting up of marketing systems and infrastructure, resource sharing and security in the pastoral areas?
5. Given the existing underdevelopment and the Militarisation and the low levels of politicisation (compared to false ethnic consciousness) of the Civil Society in the areas north of the equator and the converse in the areas to the south how do we facilitate reforms without threatening the very survival of the nation state? In other words, what forms of civic education can be put in place to facilitate demilitarisation in the North? How can the NGOs be strengthened in this process? How can existing traditional institutions be enhanced to handle questions of security, proper natural resource management and engagement of the state for purposes of pressurising it to engender marketing systems, infrastructural construction and cross border movements.

Admittedly, these are large questions. However, given the issue at hand, the funds involved and people affected, an attempt must be made to answer them as a pre-requisite to providing an understanding to the unfolding political scenario and struggles for the expansion of democratic space. This study paper has the more modest attempt at focussing on firstly, comprehending the percept of civil society in Africa: an introductory conceptualisation, secondly civil society in Africa: breaking the conceptual paralysis. Thirdly, expanding the horizons: an exclusive concept of civil society? Fourthly images of power and freedom: towards reconstructing the stakeholder relationship in Africa and Finally *pre-empting the destruction of civil society: a conclusion.*

Section I

COMPREHENDING THE PERCEPT OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN AFRICA: AN INTRODUCTORY CONCEPTUALISATION

In its initial application, little distinction was done to differentiate “civil society” from “society”. If anything, civil society was perceived as a way of conceiving society when the latter is politically active. To some, society by nature is in a state of perpetual warfare. It is the task of the state to impose order upon this violent competition among individuals. Nevertheless, what emerges out of this position is the establishment of “order” through near total subjection of individual to unlimited power.

On the other hand there is a school of thought that seeks equilibrium between the unlimited power of the state and individual rights. It is here that the idea of a constitutional state comes to the fore². It posits that it is the state’s responsibility to settle conflict in the society. The state in this sense does not occupy a position opposite to that of the society, but is if anything compliant. Society becomes civil when it seeks to define and establish legitimate political authority. Notably, the processes of establishing norms that define legitimacy are also an aspect of “civil society”. To crown this, is the process by which the dominant class create and protects its hegemonic grip on the state, while allowing the same to be presented to subordinate classes as legitimate.

Yet, others predicate civil society on the transition of “rude” society into “commercial society”. Under the former, no private property existed, and relations between men were casual. It is the acceptance of subservience under capitalist production relations that facilitates the emergence of civil society.³ Here civil society is treated not as synonymous with the adaptation of particular rules of the game, but as those behaviours by which different cultures define the rules of the game.⁴ It also argues that the missing dimension supplied by the idea of civil society is that, in the process terms working understanding concerning the basic rules of the political game or structure of the state emerge from within society and economy at large. In substantive terms, civil society typically refers to the points of agreements on what those working rules should be. Society consists of autonomous societal groups that interact with the state but delimit and constrain its action. Associational life is seen as salient to civil society.

Conventionally, civil society is defined spatially as the political space between the household and the state. It takes a more organisational and instrumentalist view and thus sees civil society in terms of an arena of negotiation and organisation. It is where individuals attempt to constitute themselves in arrangements through which they can express themselves and advance their interests. It thus comprises a set of non-governmental organisations, institutions, associations (formal and informal) authority structures, and collective activities, which group the mass of population together in different ways. Nevertheless, organisational and instrumental definitions tend to ignore relational

² Keane, J (1988a), *Democracy and Civil Society*, Verso London/New York (pp 39)

³ Pearce Jenny “Civil Society in Latin America: Historical Discourses and Contemporary Problems” in *Peace studies*, 1994 pp 19

⁴ Haberson J. W., D. Rothchild & N. Chazan (1994), *Civil Society and the State in Africa*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 312pp, ISBN 1-66687-360-X

aspects of civil society. Thus, for instance, although state and civil society are separate from each other, they are also in several ways dependant on one another at times even mutually reinforcing. Civil society exists outside of the formal political arena even though it can be drawn in when there is a political crisis.⁵ Accordingly, civil society is not society writ large, but merely a subset of it. What defines civil society is therefore its agenda ...manifestation of civil society tends to be situational and intermittent... Groups may not have been born as civil organisations but are moved by circumstances (such as demands for constitutional reform, governmental accountability, human and political rights) to engage in politics. Building on this instrumental and organisational model, we celebrated, during the end of the eighties and beginning of the nineties, the catalytic role that such groups can play in incubating and then spurring regime change.⁶ We see today civil society in Africa as fostering political democracy⁷ - it has become a cutting edge of the efforts to build a viable democratic order.

Nevertheless, there are academic forces that claim that there is nothing inherent about civil society organisations that make them opponents of authoritarianism and proponents of democracy. Accordingly the impetus for civil society involvement in the democratisation movement can be located in two externalities ... a wider social movement and political opportunity. Thus, opponents of the civil society liberalisation thesis contest the fact that organisations in the civil society, including NGOs are not central to opposing undemocratic governments and furthering and consolidating democracy. Because civil society's mobilisation is constrained by issue designs upon which campaigns are predicated, the ability of civil society organisations to design and mobilise groups on issues that have resonance in their social reality in the process beat off ethnicity driven statization tendencies, makes it hard for them to achieve commitment of rural and urban marginalised groups. Therefore, in literature on the nature of African civil society, three theses compete for mastery.

1. One thesis is spatial and contestational. It sees civil society as being primarily constituted to present a polarised position from that of the state.⁸ On this view, civil society is, *ipso facto*, in perpetual conflict with the state. Leading writers on the subject would seem to accept the conflict thesis but would narrow the realm of conflict to a much more slimmer issue: civil society's attempt to breach and simultaneously counteract totalisation tendencies of the state. Taking the contestation thesis further, we note that transitions have been greatly enhanced by protest and reforms spearheaded by civil society; thus calling for access to independent material, organisational and ideological base. The assumption in this thesis is that there is necessarily a connection between NGO activity and democratic struggle. Associational life, for instance, is likely to be most developed in economies that have undergone the greatest degree of indigenous capitalist industrialisation, equally attributing potency of democracy in an economically independent civil society.
2. The second thesis contests that this is not necessarily the case. If anything, the propensity of NGOs to actively engage the state in democratic space is hinged on threats the state

⁵ Keller E, (1997), Political Institutions, Agency and Contingent Compromise: Understanding Democratic Consolidation and Reversal In Africa

⁶ Bratton M, (1987), "The Politics of Government NGO Relations in Africa", Working Paper No. 456, IDS University of Nairobi. Bratton M, (1989), "Beyond the State, Civil Society and Associational Life in Africa", in World Politics Vol. 1 no 30 Bratton, Michael & Nicholas van de Walle, *Democratic Experiments in Africa: Regime Transitions in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, 1997

⁷ Diamond, Larry, Prospects for Democracy in Africa, Paper Presented at the Inaugural Seminar on Governance in Africa Programme, Carter Centre, Feb. 1988.

⁸ Diamond, Larry, Marc Plattner, Yuan-han Chu & Hung Mao Tien (eds) *Consolidating Third Wave Democracies: Themes & Perspectives* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1997

imposes on the specific interests of the NGOs. Accordingly, civil society constituents such as local voluntary organisations or associational bodies can be said to contribute to democratic fervency in Africa, if they embrace and express values of a democratic movement. This implies a dynamic in a given direction and shared values. Civil society accordingly lack such purposive cohesion given its diverse and narrow interests ... the only ideology that civil society has in common is that pluralism facilitates individual groups co-existence which at times run counter to democratic interests.⁹ Even if we were right, the salient questions would include, what determines whether and under what conditions a given organisation is or is not involved in political transformation, what the boundaries of civil society seen as associational life are, which associations are eligible (notwithstanding their function, origin, or membership).¹⁰

3. The other dimensions of the first thesis bring the issues of taking up their bread and butter, agrarian issues and if they were to help them organise, articulate, lobby and pressure, the state for their interests. The salient question thus is how to engender the foregoing. This calls for evolution of a process to facilitate dialogue among urban-based civil society through extended dosage of issues, mobilisation strategies, etc. Advocates of this line argue that relationships between state and civil society do not always have to be acrimonious. But that they can be cordial. This is what is called The Incorporation Thesis pointing to the state's magnetic capacity to attract segments of society (who find it desirable for close ties). Accordingly, it is created when autonomous associations adopt and act upon a civic agenda. This position in essence perceives civil society as a manifestation that is situational and intermittent. Thus, when there is no agenda, "peace" should logically prevail between state and civil society. When civil society organisations withdraw from the state to keep a distance from its channels, as a hedge against statization tendencies. Closer to this position is, which sees the potency of democracy in an economically independent civil society. Chazan moreover notes that most good is derivable not only from but near the state influence. Chazan contents that despite negativities associated with informal economy, it contributes directly to the fortification of the civil society by increasing resources its disposal while brooding its geographical scope. These even though, these activities tend to weaken the power of incumbent regimes, they also serve to promote linkages between social groups and state agencies in the process do have an important bearing on the distribution of power and creation of entrepreneurial groups whose positions do not depend on access to state resources.¹¹
4. The thesis blames the bad blood between the state and civil society on collapse of normative order, mediating their interactions.¹² Arguably, the re-establishment of such an order then logically ought to engender peace. The problem with this thesis is the assumption that there has existed such an order in the context of the colonial and postcolonial state. Both states have been extractionist and facilitated the process through literal occupation of the society. To engender control of the African society, the colonial

⁹ Ndegwa N. Stephen (1996), The Two Faces of Civil Society: NGOs and Politics in Africa, Kumarian Press Inc pp6-7

¹⁰ In fact much in the literature point to the heterogeneity of the civil society which cannot be said to represent society in totality, calling for bifurcation of civil society to different spheres of lumpen and bourgeoisie interests. Civil society in Africa is not only differentiated but is at times polarised. The former not only takes place when different institutions of civil society, pursue different causes without deterring each other, or being indifferent to one another; because of state patronage and situates civil society's subservient position to this.

¹¹ Haberson J. W., D. Rothchild & N. Chazan (1994), *Civil Society and the State in Africa*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 312pp, ISBN 1-66687-360-X

¹² Ngunyi G . M. and Gathiaka K (1993), "State Civil Society Institutions Relations in Africa in the 80s in the Socio-Political Context of Adjustment in Sub-Saharan Africa" in Peter Gibbon (ed), Scandinavian Institute of African Studies Uppsala

state stifled the traditional African civil society, which was rooted in certain sets of moral, religion, and philosophical principles. Life, economic social, and political process was predicated on this. Boundaries between social, political, religious, economic realms were porous and fluid. Hence, duties, rights and responsibilities juxtaposed themselves alongside kinship social and family ties before flowing into its political realm. It is this structure that tempered state power. The colonial state not only arrested and destroyed this growth. It also set up rigid boundaries in the political, social, economic and legal realms. The problem in Africa is this dislocation, more so given the fact that the political actors, double up in the economic realms, without being accountable to the body politic thus loosening control. Normative order can only emerge with the dismantlement of the neo-colonial state. It is this nature of the neo-colonial state that informs the acrimonious relations between it and civil society. An accountable state with legitimate power and representative structures would, by inference, facilitate the emergence and sustenance of a normative order. Otherwise, any attempt to engender such an order with a neo-colonial state would stem from a compromise of interests incumbent upon tradeoffs between bourgeoisie interests and the state against the Green movement.

Eth

CENTRALITY AND CONTROVERSY OF ETHNICITY AS A DECENTRALISATION STRATEGY: *A critical analysis of political devolution in Africa*

The single most important influence over how political devolution and democratic decentralisation has been conceived, initiated and is currently being constitutionally formalised is the politics of ethnic self-determination and self-government favoured by the transition rules and institutions. The "national liberation" struggle and the particular form of political consciousness acquired at the inception and in the course of that struggle have made ethnic-based "national self-determination" the linchpin of the new political order strategy. Consistent with this strategy, revolutionary forces have undertaken a major restructuring of the nation-state, cutting it up into a score of regional governments based on ethnic identity.

But this is not to suggest that the strategy is uncontroversial or uncontested. On the contrary, it has provoked a lot of controversy and criticism. Partisans, allies and supporters of the movement towards ethnic decentralisation seem to be sure that the ethnocentric approach to political devolution and reform is sound, and, indeed the only way to a new democratic order. On the other side, individuals and groups critical of the strategy and accompanying democratisation process are equally convinced that, left unchecked, the strategy would lead to the disintegration of the nation state. They regard this outcome as a national tragedy much worse than any sort of suppression of ethnic identity or difference.

It is not only among opposition groups and ordinary citizens that the ethnic-based transition strategy has raised doubts and fears. Western observers of the African the new political order scene have also expressed concern about it. Reportedly, while supportive in public, privately many in the international community have serious misgivings about the economic effects of a highly devolved system of regional governments based on ethnic identity. The problems that the strategy paces for political parties seeking to generate support and membership across tribal lines, and to develop platforms accordingly, have also been noted by international observers.

Yet, notwithstanding the doubts and worries it has raised in the public and within the international community, ethnocentric devolution¹³ remains the bedrock of the transition strategy. It is important, therefore, to give an account of the key problems, goals, tasks and activities that constitute the strategy. The strategy appears to have been effective not only in allowing the new political order to carry out its specific political agenda and ideological goals, but also in setting the tone for the political organisation and activities of alternative and opposition groups. It has also decidedly channelled their activities along generally ethnic lines. In this sense, the African experiment can be said to have instituted a new paradigm of political discourse and action; dissecting the country into highly devolved political and social order that has empowered the vast majority of the population.

Definition of ethnic-based transition problems: Eboe Hutchful points out the well-nigh paradoxical concurrence of *the globalisation of the capitalist economy* in the wake of the collapse of the Communist order and the emergence of ethno-nationalism.¹⁴ Ethnicity has indeed become a force to be reckoned with and social scientists have increasingly been forced to address it. How much it has deep historical roots and how much it is an ideology of the elite, legitimised on occasions by the very social scientists that presume to investigate it, remains problematic.¹⁵ Historians, looking at the issue from a relatively longer perspective, generally tend to question the permanence of the ethnic factor. As Terence Ranger has argued with reference to pre-colonial Zimbabwe, "People defined themselves *politically* - as subjects of a particular chief - rather than linguistically, or culturally, or ethnically".¹⁶ Elsewhere, too, the picture in pre-colonial times was not so much of compartmentalised ethnic communities as of multi-ethnic societies interdependent and interacting with each other.¹⁷

On the other hand, although one might be able to perceive nuances in the emphasis given to ethnic identity in British and French colonial policy, it is difficult to attribute the emergence of ethnicity entirely to colonialism. As a matter of fact, one can even argue that colonialism often ended up creating nation-states out of diverse ethnic groups. Conversely, the democratisation process and its attendant political pluralism seem to have the potential of accentuating ethnic identity. The question Africa currently faces, as Doornbos has posed it, is thus whether ethnicity threatens to bring about "a basic restructuring of state systems, beginning with most ancient of all, Africa" or whether the issues it raises would turn out to be "transient phenomena, likely to disappear soon enough as they get 'satisfied', partly perhaps through their very articulation".

Africa offers a special area of interest. It might be useful to make a few general observations from the outset. First and foremost, the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial categories do not apply in the African case. Uninterrupted by these major divides, Africa could be said to have witnessed a linear and organic historical evolution to a degree few other African countries have

¹³ This is an extreme form of transfer of State authority and power involving legal conferment of powers upon formally constituted local authorities to discharge specified or residual functions. It entails an inter-organisational transfer of power to geographical units of local government lying outside the command structure of the central government

¹⁴ Hutchful, p. 1.

¹⁵ For an argument on the mass basis of ethnicity, see Eghosa E. Osaghae, A Re-examination of the Conception of Ethnicity in Africa as an Ideology of Inter-Elite Competition, African Study Monographs, 12 (1) (June 1991), pp. 43-60. Martin Doornbos calls ethnicity "the resilient paradigm" ("Linking the Future to the Past", Review of African Political Economy, No. 52, 1991, p. 53), thereby implicitly underlining its epistemological, more than its objective, value.

¹⁶ Terence Ranger, The Invention of Tribalism in Zimbabwe (Gweru, 1985), p. 4.

¹⁷ Bayart, p. 7. For the African dimension of this historical process of interaction, see Tadesse Tamrat's articles: Processes of Ethnic Interaction and Integration in African History: The Case of the Agaw, Journal of African History, 29 (1988); Ethnic Interaction and Integration in African History: The Case of the Gafar, Journal of African Studies, 21 (1989); and Donald Crummey, Society and Ethnicity in the Politics of the Christian Africa during the Zamana Masafent, International Journal of African Historical Studies, VIII, 2 (1975), pp. 266-78.

done.¹⁸ Secondly, as Bayart has remarked, Africa could be said to have belonged to la `grande tradition étatique' de l'Europe et de l'Asie, with all the essential attributes of a feudal order, rather than to the genre of "village democracies".

The preoccupation with the "liberation" and "self-determination" of ethnic and cultural communities represents a larger issue having to do with the restructuring of the polity as a whole. It concerns the democratisation of Africa as it is understood today and operated the concept of democracy. The fundamental transition problem for the leading parties is not one of simply changing or improving the position and status of "nationalities", or, in simpler terms, ethnic groups, within. It is the radical transformation of the values, traditions and institutions of the nation-state itself in their historic and contemporary forms. Leaders and activists of the leading parties believe they are wrestling at once with the question of the self-determination of nationalities and the problem of unity connected with it.¹⁹

African unity under not only the dictatorial governments but also all previous regimes was deeply flawed. A forced unity, it was established and maintained at the expense of nations, nationalities and peoples - by the subjugation of ethnic communities in military conquests; by economic exploitation; by political tyranny in which the machinery of a centralised state was used as an instrument of national oppression; and by cultural domination which devalued and suppressed the languages, customs, and religions of diverse peoples in the country. African unity up to and including the dictatorial governments era was not based on the distinctive identities, interests and aspirations of various nationalities. Rather, it was based on the domination of a small ruling class belonging largely to the dominant ethnic group.²⁰

The claim that Africa has a "core" national tradition shared by the various nationalities inhabiting it is based more on fiction than facts. There was no core tradition, not even territorial unity. Africa's borders have continuously fluctuated, expanding and contracting with the times and powers of monarchs. There are really no fixed territorial markers of unity and identity we can take as our point of reference today.

The historical time bomb!

What does this leave the leaders of the new political order and the transition to democracy? **Practically nothing but problems to solve!** The nation-state needed to be built - and built democratically - virtually from scratch. Politically, its past is more a liability than an asset. Because nationalism was imposed on nationalities by force, it was inauthentic and unstable, chronically beset with rebellions and civil wars.²¹ Because it contradicted the rights of peoples to their own identity, culture and socio-economic and political life, it was undemocratic and a drag on the development of the country. The brutal military dictatorship of the dictatorial governments, which in the end brought the country to the edge of disintegration, was "in essence a continuation of previous regimes."

¹⁸ Already alluded to in the CODESRIA workshop. Bahru Zawde. Military and Militarism in Africa.

¹⁹ NDI, AAI, P.84; see also Marina Ottaway, "An Update on the Democratisation Process", African Review Vol. 3, No. 8, August 1993, and "Africa's Move to Political Freedom Liberates Ethnic Hatred as Well", International Herald Tribune, June 22, 1994. For in highly critical foreign perspective on the leaders of the transition strategy see Makan Wa Maputa, "The New Oligarchy" Africa Report, Vol. 38, No. 5 Sept. - Oct. 1993.

²⁰ Information drawn from interviews of B. Gebreab, a member of the leaders of the transition block in the State. The Position of Revolutions Democracy on the African Question and Unity.

²¹ leaders of the transition, The Position of Revolutionary Democracy... PP 6-7-7; ..

According to the ruling parties, following the overthrow of the dictatorial governments in the revolutionary democratic struggle of nationalities and peoples, led by itself, and the formation of the State, the old oppressive order was dismantled for good. Peace and stability were achieved and a process of democratisation initiated through which citizens and communities have been able to secure their rights to self-determination and self-government.²² Yet problems and issues remain to be settled.

The roots of the confusion:

The remaining problems stem not so much from the old African tradition itself as opposition groups, which remain, hung up on it. Leaders and architects of the new political order maintain that there are two contradictory perspectives on, or images of national unity still in contention. On one side is the old anti-democratic territorial view characteristic of previous regimes, which some political organisations have been advancing, in the new political order. On the other side is the perspective of peoples' democratic unity, first thought up by the Ethiopian Students Movement in the 1960s and subsequently picked up by various political forces before and after the outbreak of the February 1974 African Revolution. Most politicians are convinced this former has lost out to the latter, but says the task of completely "burying" the old image of Africa has yet to be accomplished. Traditional nationalism constitutes a political problematic for the new political order currently emerging strongly in two different ways or contexts.

- In one context, because the transition process has radically transformed the old image of Africa and replaced it with a completely new vision of national unity, it may have raised worries and fears among different social strata in the country. Significant sections of both the rich and downtrodden masses may hold on to remnants of the traditional model imposed on them by centuries of feudal and military rule ever more tightly when all that is familiar and unquestioned is subject to unsettling change. This is a problem whose proper resolution through education and propaganda is decisive for deepening and broadening the new peoples' democratic unity of Africa.
- Besides the challenges posed by the carry-over of remains of the old model of African Unity into the transition, the ruling party acknowledges the politics of ethnicity as a problem for reform. This acknowledgement may come as a surprise to many Africans, since the leaders of the transition itself is widely perceived to be, and actually is practising ethnic-based politics. But the leading parties distinguishes between the form of ethnocentric struggle for self-determination that it promotes, on the one hand, which is connected to the larger issue of the reconstruction of the African nation-state, and what it characterises as "narrow nationalism", or separatist ethnic politics, on the other.

It is the latter variety, which "secessionist organisations" practice; it is believed constitutes an obstacle for democratic transition. It is a problem, party leaders and members argue, insofar organisations and groups which engage in it use the legitimate democratic aspirations of peoples for self-determination and self-government to advance their own partisan agenda and to create ethnic enclaves subject to their exclusive domination and exploitation.

²² The Transitional period charter...

Statement of transition goals and objectives:

The State is articulate in stating its transition aims and positions and in promoting them within and through the State. But to describe the reform strategy is problematic. This is so for a number of reasons.

- Like any other government leading a transition from authoritarianism to democracy, the state cannot be expected to know all their political objectives and means-ends calculation openly. We cannot suppose that the formally declared aims and purposes exhaust the ideological and strategic intentions of the transitional leaders. People weary of two decades of military-socialist rule pose lingering doubts and questions about the current status and mission of the dominant organisation within the leaders of the transition coalition.
- The way in which the State operates the concepts and goals of democratic transition in specific contexts may be at variance with the global "meaning" or "sense" it attributes to them. Its specific mode of concern about democracy may be more socialist than liberal, or more substantive than procedural. Or, it may switch from the liberal code or structural model of democracy to the socialist code unpredictably. These possibilities make the task of describing leaders of the transition's reform objectives bit difficult.
- The articulation of ideas and ends of reform by the leading parties is not monolithic. It is modulated within the network of domestic and foreign participants in the African transition. It includes statements of aims for "general audiences", like the goal of securing peace and stability. But it also includes discourses and associated objectives designed primarily, though not exclusively, for consumption by specific constituencies, such as partisans and activists of the incumbent ("revolutionary democracy", "'public' ownership of land") and the international community ("free enterprise", "privatisation", "human rights").

For these reasons, it is not easy to give an exact account of the transition goals and ultimate political ends being pursued by the transitional government. Nevertheless, one can describe fairly accurately the declared reform goals of the leaders of the transition on the assumption that they are significant, if not exhaustive, indicators of the leading party's real intentions. This is admittedly a simplifying assumption, but one, which provides a point of departure for analysing an involved, and controversial transition strategy. The goals may be amenable to description not only at the level of what the incumbent broadly and formally acknowledges as its aims, but also in terms of implicative objectives and purposes and specific tactics and processes that inform a variety of the transitions activities.

The State's explicit or implied transition goals can be inferred largely from its definition of problems of democratic transition. Thus, where there was oppression of nations, nationalities and peoples, the leading parties has sought their liberation, "the freedom, equal rights and self-determination of all peoples" in opposition to forced and unstable African unity maintained under the hegemony of a small ruling class belonging to one nationality, **leaders of the transition wants "the formation of a new democratic Africa"** whose unity is securely based on the equality, common benefits and free association of peoples, and on the recognition of the right of nationalities to secession; against cultural domination of one ethnic group by another, the architects of the transition seek to ensure that the languages, customs and traditions of all

groups are equally respected and their growth is facilitated; going beyond the confines of narrow nationalism or separatist among revolutionary democratic forces within various ethnic movement of self-determination, and in this way to create country-wide political organisations and coalitions; and braking with “centuries of backwardness”, the State wants to bring about the development of Africa.

In pushing for these ends through the State, the ruling coalition believes it has been pursuing and accomplishing more than its own organisational agendas. The leading parties sees itself continuing a tradition of revolutionary democratic struggle which has been followed by other political organisations and groups in the country for decades. Many of the parties that fought for these goals, may have faded, but for the leaders of the transition, the goals themselves have remained and still are as valid and worthy as ever.

Consistent with these ends, the State has laid down, in both principle and practice, new rules of politics and government for Africa. It has marked out the specific steps, mechanisms and tactics of its transition strategy. A detailed description of these is a large undertaking, and beyond the limited scope of this study. It will suffice to note in general terms that these elements of strategy have involved the State in various projects of political, legal and constitutional construction. The State has been engaged in the task of formally structuring the field for the African transition game: setting preconditions for participation; selecting, shaping and assembling the "players", and "refereeing" its activities.

Section III

Civil Society in Africa: Breaking the Conceptual Paralysis

As one of us has noted elsewhere, there is a kind of catalepsy, or less polemically, a “paralysis of perspective” about civil society in Africa. We suggest that this paralysis is rooted in five untested assumptions frequently made about civil society generally and applied, *tout court*, to the specificities of Africa.

1. First, it is assumed that by definition, civil society is a countervailing power on the state. That assumption is moored on a fact true of Western society but hardly so of Africa: namely, that political resources are on the whole fairly distributed in society, or at any rate, that the rules for the distribution of such resources are even-handed. On this accounting, civic groups have, roughly, an equal chance of accessing these resources. That assumption, in turn, rests on a view of the state as a largely passive and generally indifferent bystander with limited adjudicatory functions. As the groups slug it out in the civic arena the state steers clear, coming in only to stem acrimony and adjust the conflicts that may get out of hand. This assumption ignores the fact that in Africa the assumed boundaries between state, political society and civil society are rather porous, one often blurs into other. As a corollary, the hands-off state implicitly assumed by some of the literature is untenable. The state in Africa is neither indifferent nor passive. Historically, its political project has been domination and its *modus vivendi* the fragmentation of any opposition to that project. In analysing civil society in Africa, therefore, one must explore not just civil society’s pluralizing potential but also the ways in which the state uses the civic

sphere and some civic institutions as vehicles for its hegemonic project, shrinking the popular sectors of civil society and sundering and frustrating democratic deepening in the process.

2. Secondly, current civil society literature has fallen under the spell of formal civic institutions. The peril in this bedazzlement lays in the implicit assumption it rests on: namely, those formal institutions are representative of key social and political interests. Which often means that interests not articulated within these formal organisations are either given a dismissive nod or ignored. Thus, much of the less “radical” literature on civil society in Africa focuses on business associations, labour unions, women’s groups, welfare associations, professional groups and the Church. The reason may be easy to hazard. Organised groups are more amenable to empirical investigation. Nevertheless, focusing on them blinds investigators to the fact that much associational life in Africa takes place outside of formal groups. There is good political sense in this. Formal groups are easier to target through licensing, criminal law, official slander, harassment or even prosecution of their leaders.
3. Thirdly, much of the literature frequently overlooks the ways in which the larger conflicts in political society are reproduced in civil society. The orthodox belief that civil society is an arena for negotiating interests, itself a touchstone of democratic deepening, masks the point that civil society can and often does feed into and aggravate existing social and political cleavages. Put differently, this assumption *declassifies* and *de-ethicises* civil society, thereby obscuring the ways in which the twin cleavages of class and ethnicity, seen by many as the bugbears of African politics, find voice and sustenance in civil society.
4. Fourthly, the key assumptions made about the state in Africa are not tenable in the context of the actual reality. Generally seen as incompetent and prebendary and often described as de-institutionalised, neo-patrimonial and sultanist, the state in Africa has been written of as an artifact of research, a museum and period piece to be occasionally dusted to surfeit the fancies of political archaeologists. This is rash. Much of the weakness of civil society in Africa has to do with the active role the state has played in fragmenting and dissipating the energies of those it distrusts. Behind its dour, turgid and seemingly lifeless aspect, the African State is “alive and well”.²³ Part of the skepticism about the future of state in Africa rests on the model against which the African State is judged. Set against “the fluid, efficiency governed, adaptive [state] model of neo-classical economies”, the African State is in shambles.²⁴ Judged thus, it seems foredoomed by the challenges it faces. However, this proof by analogy is bad social science: teleological rather empirical and historical. It assumes that what the liberal state does is the natural purpose of the state, any state. In addition, because the African State does not do these things it is concluded that it is decrepit.
5. Finally, the assumption that civil society groups properly so-called are those that are self-organising and also relatively autonomous of the state is inapplicable to most civic organisations in Africa. African Civil society’s scope for self-organisation and

²³ Sangmpam, S.N., *Neither Soft nor Dead: The African State is Alive and Well*, *African Studies Review*, Vol. 36, Number 2, September 1993. Pp.73-94

²⁴ Krasner, Stephen D, *Sovereignty: An institutional Perspective* in Caporaso, John. A. *The Elusive State, International and Comparative Perspectives*, Sage Publishers, 1989 pp. 74-80.

self-direction is often severely restricted by invasive NGO and registration of societies laws. Groups distrusted by the state must torture language into euphemisms that the hatchet man from the Office of the President finds acceptable. A welter of annual licensing requirements is often the occasion for chastising those who have not stuck to the mandate for which they were registered. Draconian powers of de-registration hung over all registered civic organisations. Those that forget that the government possesses such powers often find themselves proscribed or driven into expensive lawsuits. In terms of funding, formal civil society institutions are even more dependent. The orthodox view is that middle class forces will put their money into causes that they would like to advance. In Africa, however much of the emergent middle class has come into its own with the help of the state. If they support causes that the government dislikes, their lifelines could be severed. Moreover, even those that have not been nurtured by the state know that the state's capacity to harm them is still considerable, economic liberalisation notwithstanding. Bereft of local financial support, local organisations must then depend on external funding. Hence, the key role of donors in Africa's re-democratisation.

These propositions are put forward as flash cards for the central thesis of this chapter: Vis: that existing conceptions of civil society have limited explanatory power for the complexities of associational life in Africa. A first corrective step is a search for a more acceptable conception.

Section III

Expanding the Horizons: An Exclusive Concept of Civil Society

If, as we have implicitly suggested, civil society is a concept made to order for the political reality of western society, should we use at all in the study of African society? With great reservation, we argue that it is still serviceable for our purposes. However, we suggest two emendations.

1. First, we propose a shift in perspective from a pre-occupation with organisations and institutions to *an activity view* of civil society. Those who focus on organisational forms and institutions do a great injustice to civil society in Africa. Much that is both interesting and transformative in the continent occurs outside or at the periphery of formal organisational life. Spontaneous protests, laxity and indiscipline and active non-cooperation with the state are important civic activities that take place outside of formal organisations. Spontaneous, non-confrontational methods such as these are safer ways of registering one's disagreement with the government than more robust public thorough-fare activities such as protest marches, placard-waving and burning effigies. Moreover, an activity view of civil society also allows us to include within civil society activities, which would otherwise be invisible.²⁵ No account of African civil society is complete if it does not deal with this fact. The key corrective here is perhaps to alert students of African politics why clan and ethnic groups have remained so fundamental to African politics. Two reasons stand out. For one, tribe and ethnic identity give groups a political language. And as Lonsdale reminds us, a

²⁵ For instance, much that is articulated by ethnic and kinship groups, such as families and clans, is easy to ignore, dismissed as *non-civic-activity*, since these groups hardly meet the definitional criteria of civil society. However, even without treating ethnic groups as civic groups we need to see that many of their activities engaging the state are civic activities.

political language unites people over what to argue about; it provides the images on which they can base their ideologies [and] ideologies mobilise political support around social divisions. Moreover, in the context of an increasingly mobile and deracinated African professional class, ethnic identity provides social anchorage and orientation. Many urban-based professionals are members, if not senior officials of their clan and tribal associations. If they intend to pursue a political career, clan and ethnic support may make the difference between failure and success.

2. People's histories and identities are encoded in their customs, as are their philosophies of power, justice and entitlement. In those African countries where official histories and ideologies have reworked the past in order to buttress predatory government, ethnic awareness and historiography, even if oral, may be the only effective counterweight to the state's hegemonic project. On this view, rather than see ethnicity as the rupturing force of African politics we see it as the proper starting point for the study of African social movements and of civil society. One recognises thereby the fact that democratisation will not advance unless we explore "the interior architecture of tribe."²⁶ This means explicating not just the "social and moral codes of ethnicity" and kinship but also, crucially, investigating the ways in which these codes intersect with issues of class, gender and poverty.²⁷ The point being to illuminate the intuitively felt but rarely expressed fact that in Africa class and tribe are not always opposed categories. Ethnicity supplies the grammar and metaphor of African politics, even for the middle classes. It frames the political and social demands that they make on the state. The African middle class straddles the twilight zone between individualism and communitarianism. They are not just members of a class; they are also sons and daughters of the tribe. They are held up as icons of its progress and power. Its emissaries at negotiations and their exploits the stuff of which fireside tales is made.
3. As we note below the violence of the colonial state nurtured civic resistance and more important led to substantial distrust of the state and other official institutions. Traditionally high trust institutions such as the family, clan and tribe then became the site for political activity. There is a third corrective. We propose to move away from pre-occupation with rights articulation and advocacy as the key features of civic action. We argue that rights articulation reveal a western bias. Therefore, groups organised for economic ends are frequently not treated as civic actors. They are seen, more sceptically, as instruments for personal accumulation. This conception unfairly circumscribes what civil society means in Africa. Groups created to advance personal economic interests such as farmers' co-operatives and associations, clan and tribal welfare organisations, are often the most active sites of state/society conflict. They help nurture an economic elite, especially in the rural areas, that is relatively independent of the state and that often incubates future political leadership.

Section III

IMAGES OF POWER AND FREEDOM:

²⁶ (Lonsdale, id: 210)

²⁷ See generally pp. 208-215 of Lonsdale's chapter.

TOWARDS RECONSTRUCTING THE STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP IN AFRICA

The agnostic tone struck in this section regarding current theoretical and funding approaches to African civil society are rooted in a general optimism about the potential of African civil society and of the hopes for democratic renewal in Africa. The chapter however has the overall objective of pointing out the gaps in current approaches, showing where those approaches may proffer solutions worse than the ailment. This task is especially urgent because much of the theory on African civil society has programmatic objectives: intended to furnish a philosophical justification for current donor interventions in the continent. Having argued that much of the theory is inadequate, this last section highlights the neighbourhoods we must ply if we are to find theories more faithful to the realities we seek to change.

1. First, there is need for much more attention to the African state. A good deal of its supposed weaknesses is not empirically established. They are rather analogised from the parlous condition of the state in Europe in the last century. The patrimonial state is pre-capitalist and had to rupture under the press of capitalist development.²⁸ A key limitation in the empirical investigation of the African state has been the lack of settled operational variables. The difficulty of a task is however a bad argument for its scholarly neglect. Moreover, by analogising the evolution of civil society in Africa to that of European civil society²⁹ the literature ignores the ways in which the foisting of colonialism on Africa changed the trajectory of the evolution of the state and hence of the civil society that developed within the institutional framework established by that state. In particular, the evolution of the colonial state as a low trust institution should give pause to those that disvalue segmental loyalty and kinship identity as a basis for civic action. The French declaration of the rights of man celebrated not just rights of individuals but also “fraternity,” a fact obscured by Anglo-American rights discourse. Fraternal bonds are the refuge that the African middle class takes when faced by a predatory state. Political and economic reprisals against members of an ethnic elite are always interpreted as attempts to “finish that ethnic group.”
2. Second, studies of African democratisation need to resist the unwarranted theoretical jump from “the state is not viable” to “civil society is the key to Africa’s success.” Civil society in Africa, as elsewhere, has arisen historically and relationally. The importance of informal groups, spontaneous protests, suffer-mange, indiscipline and laxity as foils of civic action has everything to do with the predations of the African state. Thus, African society’s relation with the state ought to be placed in historical continuum, seen as the natural, though not inevitable consequence of the evolution of that state. What has been lacking so far in much of the literature is a more sensitive analysis, one that carefully limns the complexities of state/society interaction. In particular, an analysis that explores the specific inter-penetrations between political and civic institutions, the political and social forces unleashed by that interaction, the changing patterns of elite behaviour implied therein and the larger question how all these undermine or support democracy.

²⁸ Mamdani, 1996:11 *Contradictory Class Perspectives on the Question of Democracy: The Case of Uganda*, in Anyang’ Mamdani, Mahmood, *Citizen and Subject -Contemporary Africa and The Legacy of Late Colonialism-* Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1996.

²⁹ Mamdani 1996:9-16 Nyong’o (ed) *Popular Struggles for Democracy in Africa*, London University Press

3. Third, because the state in Africa has evolved as a low trust institution it is neither neutral nor disinterested in civil society's political choices. Much of its institutional logic focuses on fragmenting and sundering opposition targeted at it. In discussing the pluralizing potential of African civil society, therefore, there is need to go beyond exclamations of Eureka! To disentangle the double jeopardy confronting African civic groups: the *self-regarding task* of survival in a hostile institutional environment and the *instrumental one* of changing state behaviour. Akin to this is the cruel reality that the state is a player in civil society, sometimes directly, sometimes through proxies. This sustains the distrust existing between groups in civil society, sometimes nurturing the polarities observed earlier.
4. Finally, scholars should not set too much store by economic reform or on its potential to democratise the African state and hence liberate civil society. Efforts to shrink the state, as via adjustment, rest on an obvious paradox: shrinking the state is an act of auto-limitation. It is the state that must pare itself down. (Hutchful, 1995). Since regimes are not self-annihilating, we can expect that they will "manipulate and selectively implement adjustment programs" in ways that do not threaten, "core regime interests." Rather than strengthen civil society economic reform may serve to shift the sites of repression. Moreover, exogenously driven reforms often give governments the feeling that they are being bullied. This may considerably undermine the commitment of such a government to the reforms and deepen its antipathy to both the domestic reform constituents and to donors. Local pro-reform groups are then perceived as a fifth columnist for the donors, acceptable targets of state reprisals. Donors, on their part, are often seen as allies of the domestic opposition.

In Africa, reform efforts from donors have tended to feed into a siege mentality pervasive in key state actors. Feeling buffeted from all sides, principally by the opposition and donors, the state often implements reforms in a manner that will not substantially erode its hold on the economy or undercut the state elite's economic power. Sometimes the reforms are sequenced and paced in a way that maximises benefit to the state elite, both instrumentally and politically. African governments began its privatisation program by off-loading the smallish, often profit-making enterprises in which some of its key officials and cronies were investors. On the key parastatals, often the arenas of the state's redistributionist and patronage politics, much remains to be done. The point is that economic reforms that the state patronises in this way are likely strengthen the state elite, enrich their cronies and undermine the actual reform measures and constrain the emergence of significant democratic forces within civil society. In turn, this suggests that we must also reject the assumption that civil society groups have equal access o political as well as other resources. Class cleavages, differentiated access and favoritism define the way different groups relate to the state and to political society and the market.

Pre-empting the destruction of civil society:

A conclusion

Much of what donors have done in Africa in support of civil society have had a significant impact on political change. No doubt, the repeal of one party law in Africa was spurred by donor pressure. Critically, the constitutional reform debate now underway has been led by donor funded NGOs. This and more can be done. However, aid is an addiction, fostering financial and, recently and more perniciously, intellectual dependency. A word of caution then: the road to

perdition may be strewn with good intentions. The key question for donors is the possibility of giving principled and sustainable support to civil society. This suggests broadening as well as deepening knowledge of African civil society; in particular understanding what might sap or enervate it.

1. First, there is surely a case for a good faith effort by donors to civil society to find rural groups worth supporting. Many urban-based groups are no doubt well meaning and will probably make valiant efforts to link with rural groups and to impart lobby skills on them. Nevertheless, good intentions are about all they can offer. Many are ill-prepared for the difficulties of communication entailed in working at the grass-roots, they may be blind to pressing local needs, the cost of conducting surveys on needs can be prohibitive, they may be distrusted and lack a continuing presence in the community. They can therefore become itinerant problem solvers and fly by night operators. Long-term support to African civil society may profit from building partnerships, twining arrangements, between local groups and urban-based donor funded civic groups. That would be an important corrective to the current pre-occupation with civil and political rights. Grassroots Groups are likely to have an economic and social mandate as opposed to legal ones. Many of the organisations that are invisible to donors are in the economic sphere. Yet, these have often been able to cause shifts in government behaviour through civic action. Twining arrangements linking these economic groups with human rights and legal advocacy groups could be beneficial to both: rooting the legal groups in society and giving the economic groups advocacy skills. These links would also help urban middle class groups capture and even channel the political energy that comes from spontaneous civic action in the rural areas.
2. Second, donors and civil society ought to be ever alert to the *raison d'être* of their relationship. The intransigence of the state was the occasion for the consummation of donor/civil society relationship. The donor's first love was always the state. After all, aid has traditionally been a government-to-government business. Civic groups in South Africa are learning this rather painfully. In the context of an open and transparent Mandela government, support for civil society has declined rather precipitously. Most organisations never anticipated this. Forced to live with less they have had to learn some lessons from the anorexic American corporation: how to become ever leaner. Nevertheless, the donors were also guilty of failing to plan. Surely, if aid will inevitably remain a government-to-government business, it behooves those who give it and the non-governmental organisations that receive it to anticipate that one day it must all cease. This means planning for exit. Which suggests investing in sustainability?³⁰

One gets the impression that NGOs and donors worry more about institutional sustainability, hence the frequent question of "what are you doing to raise funds locally." Though this is a legitimate concern, programmatic sustainability is probably of more immediate impact on

³⁰ Donor's most frequent complaint about their civil society support is that civic institutions are not sufficiently accountable and that most are not sustainable. No donor in the studies above distinguished between *institutional sustainability*, that is the sustainability of the NGO as an organisation and *programmatic sustainability*, which is the sustainability of the programs initiated by the NGOs that they funded. Most are also unclear, as a result about what investing in sustainability meant. Some donors have said that they have always invested in sustainability and had over the year's evolved mechanisms for handing over projects to the beneficiaries.

democratisation. In addition, it is on this that the sustainability question should focus. If the consolidation of the civil society is central to any meaningful attempts at consolidating the democratisation process in Africa, then it is imperative that we examine and analyse the textual structure and content of the civil society realm and the organisations therein by asking relevant questions. Salient to this process is the need to undertake an audit of civil society organisations in Africa. Such an audit will facilitate our understanding of the nature of their activities, relations among themselves, donors and the state and how these facilitates or constraints their agendas. The audit will also facilitate our understanding of how civil society organisations can consolidate their control over the democratic space while engaging the state in further struggles to expand it. To this end, it is imperative that we move beyond our contemporary pre-occupation with the state-civil society confrontation and instead seek to understand the position from which state and civil society confront each other and how.

It is noteworthy that, there is no institution in Africa that can realistically be said to be free of ethnicity. This implies that rather than focus on the ethnic difference as the key analytic in studies of African democracy and civil society, we need to recast the question. To instead ask, why some organisations, prominently has the Church managed some differences in a manner that have not led to rupture and acrimony? Why has ethnicity not undermined the capacity of the Church to be a force for democracy? Equally, having recognised the low trust that characterises political exchange between state and society, is there perhaps an argument that analysts accept the family, the clan and the tribe as the starting point for the reconstruction of a more realistic theory of the African civil society and of democratisation in the continent?

Relevant Policy Recommendations

We can assert that the prevailing poverty situation in Africa is structurally much more than it is demand or supply driven, reinforcing this situation in existing legal, administrative and constitutional structures at one level and biased economic policies at another. Meaningful poverty alleviation programmes will therefore have to stem out of a totally restructured political and economic system. Such far-reaching reforms would go far in empowering and subsequently strengthening the civil society. Such reforms must be geared towards providing an irreducible minimum of the first and second-generation rights for every citizen. Emphasis should be put on accessibility to ownership of the means of production. Constitutional reforms should not only facilitate the repeal of legal, administrative and agrarian regime of laws, but also institutionalise certain second-generation rights.

Next let move to governance is critical to any meaningful political, economic and social development. It is imperative that capacity building for sound governance is emphasised. Effectiveness of government and its relationship to civil society are key determinants in whether the nation is able to create and sustain equitable opportunities for its people. Among the most important tasks of states is the creation of a political environment conducive to sustainable human development. There is therefore need for the government to commit itself to engendering access to economic opportunities providing infrastructure, facilitating decentralisation, while maintaining standards of public health and safety at affordable costs. They should also engender political inclusion through free and fair elections, freedom of association and expression, rule of law, and security. The foregoing can help to enhance good governance. But in addition, the government must engender transparency, promote equity and equality, promote gender balance, mobilise resources for social purposes, encourage efficient and effective use of resources while remaining accountable, assume regulatory roles much more than controlling roles, while engendering legitimacy in itself in the eyes of its people.

The implication in this is the necessity to rebuild socio-political and economic institutions that can restart meaningful economic and societal development. This calls for the setting up of institutions with strong cognitive, normative and regulative structures in order to provide meaning to social behaviour. Institutionalisation is imperative given the fact that it facilitates evolution of shared definition of social reality by defining the way things are and the way things should be handled. Institutionalisation should be enhanced because of the very fact that it ensures for shared assumptions, beliefs and values. One way towards realising this is the need for parliamentary participation in approving presidential appointments.

Strengthening the enabling environment for sustainable human development is not only dependent on how the state is governed and private sector provides jobs and income, but also how the civil society organisations that facilitate political and social interaction and mobilise groups in society are enabled to participate in socio-economic and political activities. Civil society organisations are creations of society, which can provide important checks and balances on government power and on the private sector. They also have the potential of strengthening both the domains while helping to monitor the environment, resource depletion, pollution and social abuses, and distribution of benefits of economic growth equitably within the society. Their roles in engendering and channelling participation in economic and social activities while organising people into more potent groups to influence policy must be underscored. Civil society organisations must therefore carve for themselves an important role in mitigating potentially adverse effects in economic stability while providing a voice to poorer sectors of society in political and government decision-making.

Civil society organisations can also help overcome market failures and weaknesses while helping low income household greater purchasing power and cost advantages by combining their purchases and eliminating intermediaries. Given the fact that the civil society arena is a home to a wide range of trade unions, NGOs, community based organisations, corporatives, and citizen watchdog organisations, etc, it is important that the civil society organisations collaborate and coordinate their activities. Fundamental to this is the need for these organisations to clamour for an institutional framework that can facilitate their activities.

Critical to national development is the environment that can facilitate the same. Increasing political tensions and inter-community clashes militate against such an environment. This is the reason why the government should not only seek to provide an enabling environment but also cooperate with NGO financial institutions to:

- ✦ Accessing the poor both the rural and urban folks, credit facilities
- ✦ Strengthen their socio-economic support systems with institutional strengthening measures such as information management, auditing, organisation, etc.
- ✦ There is need to pressure the government to facilitate strict application of finance
- ✦ Enactment of laws to redress the existing environment where those in position have acquired wealth while punishing others such laws should be aimed at rationalising ownership of and redistribution of wealth.
- ✦ Guarantee economic citizenship to all.
- ✦ Repeal of all constitutional sections that discriminate and economically marginalize people from the pastoralist communities
- ✦ To afford all Africans equal opportunities, irrespective of disabilities

Political transition and reform strategy

The formal reform process is usually initiated with the adoption of a Constitutional Conference or Charter of largely ethnic-based guerrilla organisations. The State was established as the ultimate state authority in the country combining legislative and executive powers under the charter. These Constitutional Conferences and Charter were intended to serve as “the supreme law of the land” until a government is elected on the basis of new constitutions. Currently, the leaders of the transition are consolidating and advancing its transition project through constitutional means. New constitutions have been drafted and approved by assemblies of sorts, and the election of members to the Constituent Assembly that has ratified it has already been convened.

Under the new rules of political engagement ethnic-based organisations are the major actors, and formal transition activity is largely their activity. They constitute the central subject and instruments of democratisation. Constitutions enshrine “the unlimited right of any nation, nationality or people to self-determination, including the right to secession”. According to many constitutional commissions, appointed by the State to draft the Constitution and preside over its public discussion and debate, the whole process was democratic and popular in that *“the people ... were involved in it from the start. We know of no country which involved the people to freely discuss the entire content and form of the constitution of their country”* *The constitutional process was “open and transparent, since it took into account and publicised various views expressed by different groups within and outside the State.”*

The formal reform process represents a major achievement of its transition strategy. It signifies sound constitutional entrenchment of democratic gains made through the State.

Ethnic –based democratic reforms and a blend of equitable growth: In defining the problems of the African transition and proposing solutions for them, i.e. in setting goals, and tasks for itself and the State, and in attempting to solve the problems, the leaders of the transition has done so largely within a particular tradition of political thought, argument and struggle. The tradition has origins in the radical student movement, in ideas of “national liberation”, “class struggle”, “national democratic revolution” spawned by that movement, in international Marxist-Leninist thought, and in the revolutionary experiences of former and existing communist countries, notably the Soviet Union, China and Albania.

With its successes and failures, and its recent global deflation, that tradition of political thought, discourse and action has been a decisive influence over the leaders of the transition struggle for freedom. It was formative of the ways in which it has thought up and initiated its political project, and has continued to guide much of its subsequent revolutionary experience. And at a time when the tradition seems a spent force in much of the former second world, a toned down and somewhat reconstructed version of it seems to have gained a new lease on life. Leaders and activists are committed revolutionary democrats, although at a time when this is eclipsed by the norms of Western democracy, they may be disinclined to vow their commitment to the revolutionary tradition in so many words, preferring to characterise themselves as “revolutionary democratic forces”.

This means that specific features of the revolutionary seal and tradition mark various aspects of the transition's ideological and organisational activities. As such, they are subject to limitations interest in the structural model of that tradition of political thought, discourse and practice.

Among these limitations are:

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- The tendency to reduce broad-based and complex categories, like national tradition, the people and democracy of autonomous content, and the plenitude of meaning implicated in these categories to a set of signification tied to particular class interests or political projects;
- The inclination to saturate historically specific and localised problems of socio-economic and political change with global issues,
- To impose ground themes and formulae onto the concrete situations faced by particular communities and nations;
- A habit of discourse and argument whereby a vanguard party exerts ideological effort in the making or remaking of the "national" selves and identities of the people over whom the party exercises political control while at the same time taking them unproblematically as given in advance (whether historically or culturally or naturally) rather than produced in the vanguard party's own ideology;
- In the process of nationalist ideology as a construct of an explicit political conceptualisation produced by a vanguard organisation is conflated into ideas and values of "the nationality" into the consciousness of "the people". This tendency often leads the organisation in question to regard opposition to its partisan views and perspectives as opposition to popular opinion, as the work of "anti-people" elements, with all that this implies for democracy and democratisation.

These limitations of the structural model of revolutionary social democratic political thought and practice, within which or a version of which the transition operates in large part, are manifested in the ways in which the State and institutions of governance it has assembled defined the problems of democratic change and proposed solutions for them, and in aspects of its management of the African transition. Let us take problem definition and goal setting first.

Like other countries in transition, Africa face urgent and pressing issues and problems of democratisation to be settled. But there are alternative ways of weighing up and framing the issues and of charting the course of action, which may be embarked upon towards their settlement. There is no simple or immediate identification of African transition problems as they actually are; there is only a definition of them from a certain perspective and towards a certain "resolution". The State's perspective on or formation of the problems and their solutions constitutes one among other actual or possible perspectives, though a dominant one to be sure. Recognition of this fact by the leaders of the transition would represent a significant improvement in its democratic consciousness and practice. What is important in the politics of democratisation is not so much the problems of transition itself as what various, competing organisations and groups conceive them to be and how the organisations "settle" their conceptual differences.

In identifying historic African national tradition as an obstacle for revolutionary democratic transition, it equates "problems" of democratisation posed within the terms of the social democracy doctrine or worldview to which it subscribes with the problems as such. Committed by its ideology and by the nature of its political struggle to revolutionary "standards" and ideals of nationality and of democracy, the State portrayed actually existing African Unity as an inherent impediment to democratic transition in the country. In place of Africans established through collective memory and effective history, the State wants Africans constructed through concepts and formulas of national equality and revolutionary democracy.

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The issues of democratic transition that the State articulates in this context can therefore be seen in part as whatever it states within its ideological problematic, whether its formulation of the issues have anything to do or not with the democratisation of Africa. Indeed, the transition may be little more than a setting for exploring or experimenting with the global themes and preoccupation of revolutionary democracy, viz., abolition of class oppression and national and gender inequalities, and of State boundaries created against conventional norms of regional administration and what the opposition claims is "against the interests and wishes of peoples" and so on.

History, then, must give way to ideology, as a basis of African Unity and nationalist, specifically revolutionary democratic, argument and justification, must replace national sentiments and instincts. The transition, following the lead of nationalism of the African Student Movement and other "radical" organisations and movements, rejected the African tradition in favour of a form of contemporary nationalism based on the global themes of "liberation", "self determination", "democracy" and "socialism".

The city elite and opposition groups complain that, in this light, the issues of democratisation that the nation poses and seeks to settle may be seen more as a feature of its ideology than a feature of Africa, though the country certainly faces problems of democratic transition. For it is difficult to see how ethnic-based democratisation constitutes the democratisation of Africa. When all that is constitutive of its historic identity and unity is subject to rejection and deconstruction, how does this become a subject of democratic change?

This claim of reductionism in approaching national tradition along with the naively rationalist criticism that goes with it, is predicated on the polarity the new political order draws between historically sedimented values, sentiments and symbols of the tradition, on the one hand, and

This claim of reductionism in approaching national tradition ... is predicated on the polarity the new political order draws between historically sedimented values, sentiments and symbols of that tradition, on the one hand, and contemporary ideas and projects of self-determination, which the are being promoted by it, on the other.

contemporary ideas and projects of national self-determination which the are being promoted, on the other. It is based on a dualism of effective history and revolutionary ideology. This polarisation is indefensible in its assumption that the two forms of African national experience are mutually

exclusive. If we don't accept it, and there may be good reasons for not accepting it, the arguments that the incumbents make on its basis become untenable.

Political issues of self-determination and democratisation specific to nationalities inevitably raise problems, which cannot be neatly enslaved within either any one of these ethnic groups or contemporary ideology. While they constitute more or less distinct cultural area, one cannot conclude from this that their contemporary national aspirations can be seen in isolation from or in opposition to issues and problems or in opposition to issues and problems of historic African tradition. They constitute broader African national elements, intersections and consequences. The two forms of African national experience are not necessarily incompatible; nor need they be in conflict. Rather, they may be mutually complementary, as would two images of the same terrain portrayed from alternative perspectives.

This means that problems of democratisation need not be defined in terms of individual projects of ethnic self-determination or the aggregate of such projects. They can be defined and addressed within a board-based multi-ethnic political process. The commitment of the State and

ethnic-based organisations within the State or outside, to progressive ideas of democracy and ethnic quality does not compel them to use the categories of modern, largely Western, nationalism ("liberation", self-determination", etc.) in a way that devalues and negates Africa's own national tradition. Their commitment to democratic change does not necessarily entail a rejection of their ancestral national heritage. This is particularly true of the Northerners. If historic African nationalism cannot be said to have a core tradition shared by all ethnic groups, which inhabit the country, neither can it be characterised as entirely lacking in elements and dimensions that cut across and connect diverse communities.

The polarity between historical and ideological bases of national unity can serve the useful critical purpose of evaluating the traditional values and assumptions of Africans against the categories and models of modern, liberationist nationalism, and of correcting the limitations of those values. It can help to emphasise the important point that our collective memory and experience as a nation should not constitute a drag on our present capacity for change and development. But this is not possible so long as the current trendiness construes, as it does, the relation between historical and ideological bases of citizenship in simple opposition terms and attempts to limit national consciousness entirely to the present.

The problem with the portrayal of the national tradition as a problem for democratic change, then, is that certain processes, implicitly or explicitly, prevent the tradition from entering into meaningful "dialogue" with contemporary ethnic-based movements of self-determination. The former is either excluded from the latter or figure in them only in the overly politicised and debased form of an oppressive chauvinism, merely as a target of criticism and deconstruction. Oppression of nationalities has been made the defining characteristic, the sum-total of national tradition. Like other nations, Africa has folklore, legends and narratives through which its people invest their history with meaning and value³¹. They have been subjected to "materialist" criticism from the perspective of its "scientific" standards of historical knowledge and truth as if they were simply epistemological categories.

On the other end of the historical-ideological polarity between nationalism, the new political order has placed a heavy emphasis on the differences of ethnic communities rather than what

It would be a mistake, however, to suggest, that this demand, along with the highly negative and overly politicised view of the historical process of nation-state formation on which it is based, constitutes the spontaneous response of ethnic communities to their incorporation into the African polity. It is not necessarily democratic nor popular. No one entire ethnic community or nationality has ever been locked in combat with another in an all out struggle for "liberation".

they share in common, on the self of nationalities and their liberation. This emphasis, over-emphasis really, is the other side of the equally exaggerated, over-politicised identification of the African tradition with oppression of nationalities, in the phrase used by the African Student Movement, with "a prison of nations". Hence, the revolutionary demand that Africa be "born again", and "born different"

through the liberation and self-determination of ethnic groups.

It would be a mistake, however, to suggest, that this demand, along with the highly negative and overly politicised view of the historical process of nation-state formation on which it is based, constitutes the spontaneous response of ethnic communities to their incorporation into the African polity. It is not necessarily democratic or popular. No one entire ethnic community or

³¹ Opposition groups and the private press claim that But these elements of the African tradition have been dismissed by the leaders of the transition as a manifestation of the "fiction" of that tradition, its lack of footing in historical "facts".

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nationality has ever been locked in combat with another in an all out struggle for "liberation". The demand can more accurately be seen as a form of "elite advocacy": a making out of a case by limited revolutionary groups within different ethnic communities for the radical transformation of the African nation state. It represents political projects undertaken by particular organised movements on behalf of entire "nations" and "peoples". Much of the discussion and debate around the demand was generated by leftist, specifically Marxist-Leninist discourse in the hay day of the student's movement.