Support for Civil Society

Possibilities and Pitfalls for Donor Agencies and Northern NGOs

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Sammanfattning

Följande studie syftar till att belysa begreppet "civilt samhälle" och diskutera vissa problem och möjligheter i samband med stöd till detsamma.

Inledningsvis diskuteras vilken betydelse som det civila samhället kan förväntas ha för politisk, ekonomisk och social utveckling. Jag kommer då att hävda att man kan urskilja två huvudsyften, vid sidan om olika organisationers egentliga uppgifter. Det första är det pluralistiska. Ett livaktigt civilt samhället ses som en grund för den liberala demokratin genom att en uppsjö med oberoende folkliga organisationer utgör en balans gentemot staten och andra grupper. Genom sin förekomst antas dessa organisationer motverka populistiska och totalitära drag, samt tjäna till att föra in folkligt engagemang och intresse i det politiska livet.

Den andra funktionen består i det civila samhällets utbildande, eller fostrande, effekt. Genom att delta i organisationer antas medlemmarna utveckla känslor för sina gemensamma intressen, solidaritet och medborgaranda. Med en anglicism brukar detta beskrivas som "socialt kapital". Studien hänvisar här till forskningsrön vilka visar på detta "sociala kapitals" betydelse för administrativ och ekonomisk effektivitet. Vidare citeras en rapport från UNDP som hävdar att all biståndsverksamhet bör beakta denna aspekt eftersom detta i hög grad avgör insatsernas effektivitet.

Rapporten fortsätter med att diskutera olika former av kritik som har framförts gentemot idéerna om det civila samhällets betydelse. För det första menas då att dessa idéer innehåller både deterministiska och etnocentrisktiska drag. För det andra refereras uppfattningen att teorier om det civila samhällets betydelse inom sig rymmer en motsättning, eftersom den utbildande och den pluralistiska kan komma att motverka varandra. Givet att en högre grad av socialt kapital har en positiv inverkan på statens effektivitet, så kan detta i vissa fall motverka de effekter vi förväntar oss av den pluralistiska funktionen—nämligen att begränsa

statens makt. Samma motsättning kan sägas föreligga inom organisationerna—för att fylla sin fostrande funktion bör dessa vara horisontella och bygga på ett aktivt deltagande från medlemmarna. Men denna struktur kan motverka organisationernas effektivitet vad gäller den pluralistiska funktionen.

För det tredje berörs den skola som hävdar att enskilda organisationers och särintressens inflytande över staten i själva verket kommer att minska den senares effektivitet, och i längden leda till icke önskvärda utfall.

Till sist refereras den kritik som bygger på att det civila samhället inom sig måste rymma en högre grad av politisk laddning för att bereda rum för verkliga förändringar.

Efter att debatten på detta sätt gåtts igenom ställs då frågan: Vad är då det civila samhället? Det är helt klart att alla organisationer och institutioner i samhället inte kommer att bidra till de effekter som vi förväntar oss av det civila samhället. Jag argumenterar här för att teoretiska perspektiv i detta sammanhang har en mycket begränsad nytta. I stället bör vi utgå från ett praktiskt perspektiv och fråna oss vilken typ av organisation som kommer att bidra till dessa positiva effekter.

Efter en genomgång av empiriska studier presenteras en modell där små, informella grupper med hög grad av deltagande sammanlänkas till nationella organisationer och federationer på den högre nivå. Genom en sådan struktur kan både den fostrande och den pluralistiska effekten främjas. Organisationernas egentliga syfte betraktas som oviktigt i sammanhanget—en kooperativ bank eller en fotbollsförening betraktas a priori som likvärdiga i detta sammanhang. Däremot påvisas riskerna med organisationer som bygger på en etnisk eller religiös grund.

Slutligen betonas de politiska partiernas roll för det civila samhället. Den traditionella diskursen tenderar i många fall att avvisa dessa roll, men nyare rön visar att det civila samhällets betydelse i hög grad är avhängig av det politiska systemet.

Efter att på detta sätt ha målat upp en teoretisk grund går jag vidare till att diskutera hur det civila samhället kan stödjas. Efter att ha gått igenom erfarenheter i detta avseende, konstateras att lyckade projekt ofta har vissa gemensamma drag. De syftar till att skapa förutsättningar för folklig organisering, i stället för att ge direkt stöd. Detta kan innebära utbildning, information, ordna kreditmöjligheter etc. Vidare är dessa projekt väl anpassade till lokal kultur och förutsättningar, även om utnyttjande av utomstående "katalysatorer" är

väl dokumentarat i samband med lyckade projekt. Till sist noteras att många projekt arbetar med en relativt avancerad organisationsstruktur med flera nivåer.

Vad gäller stöd via svenska enskilda organisationer finns det mycket som talar för att dessa har speciella föreutsättningar för att bedriva stöd till organisationer i det civila samhället. Detta därför att de i många fall har god lokalkännedom, ofta har egen erfarenhet från folkrörelsearbete, och dessutom kan ta sig an även diplomatiskt känsliga projekt. Detta till trots konstareras att detta stöd kan vara mindre effektivt p g a avsaknad av helhetsperspektiv, eller genom att skapa beroende.

Därefter diskuteras några temata av betydelse för stöd till det civila samhället. Det första är just risken för beroende, vilket kan sägas vara speciellt oroande vid stöd till det civila samhället, eftersom detta bygger på en idé om folkligt initativ och deltagande. I samband med detta diskuteras hur länge stöd bör fortgå.

Den största diskussionen rör dock sambandet mellan organisationer och institutioner. Jag argumenterar där för att det civila samhällets organisationer måste betraktas i förhållande till sin institutionella kontext. Stöd till det civila samhället kan, i enlighet med detta, även ske genom att söka reformera denna kontext, för att därigenom indirekt söka förbättra förutsättningarna för folklig organisering. Detta kan t ex ske genom förvaltningsreformer, utveckling av det judiciella systemet och decentralisering. I detta sammanhang är statens agerande av största vikt men även media och partisystemet nämns i rapporten. Jag noterar även att denna typ av indirekt, eller infrastrukturellt, stöd dels kan få mer omfattande konsekvenser och dels minska risken för biståndsberoende. Vidare menar jag att en högre grad av samordning mellan svenska enskilda organisationers och Sidas insaster kan vara till stor nytta genom respektive parts speciella förutsättningar.

Avslutningsvis drar jag ut några konsekvenser av detta resonemang. Vad som idag behövs är mer systematisk kunskap i dessa frågor, och vi behöver även ett bredare strategiskt fokus på stödet till det civila samhället. Utbyte med den akademiska världen och dess land- och regionspecialister är en möjlighet att nå bättre kunskap om hur stödet kan effektiviseras. En högre grad av samordning efterfrågas likaså, men jag betonar avslutningsvis att detta inte får leda till att man försöker applicera patentlösningar vid detta stöd. Det civila samhället föds mellan människor och är beroende av känsla för lokala sedvänjor och sociala institutioner. Att bortse från detta kan vara en dödsstöt för aldrig så välmenande projekt.

Introduction

The concept of civil society has attracted greatly increased attention during the last decade. Civil society, together with such kindred notions as social capital, civic community and the third sector, are pet concepts in development discourse today.[1] Numerous official declarations suppose the benevolent effects of civil society.[2] Yet considerable confusion persists as to the underlying meaning and potential benefits of these phenomena. Systematic treatment is rare, and the empirical evidence, though abundant, seldom treats the subject in a related way. The present article aims to shed some light on the subject. The purpose is not to enter a conceptual or semantic discussion, but rather to provide a theoretical framework with practical implications for donor agencies.

After reviewing the discourse on development aid, I shall consider some themes for further discussion. I shall argue that support for civil society cannot be restricted to organisations, but must directed at institutions also, especially at the official level (decentralised centres of decision-making, administrative reform, etc.). I will also argue that support for civil society would be served by taking a broader strategic perspective, which would include assessing the prospects and possibilities in each nation.

With that said, I would like to give the reader a word of warning: the debate on civil society is huge, and the aim of this report has neither been to consider all theoretical arguments nor to offer complete solutions. My sole purpose in this paper is to offer some guidelines for a richer and more concrete discussion.

Materials

The present study draws on materials from the academic discourse of the last decade. Most of the sources are in English, but some are in Spanish and French. The consultant has selected the materials; such selections are, of necessity, arbitrary to a certain extent. The works and cases reviewed, however, are commonplace in the discourse.

I have used sources of three major types. First, theoretical arguments springing from a mainly academic context. Second, empirical examples drawn from attempts made to strengthen civil society through developmental aid. Such empirical evidence has been

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[1] The discourse is marked by a profusion of acronyms as well, e.g., NGO, GRO, MO, GRSO, NGDO, CSO., etc.

[2] For example; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; *DAC Orientations on Participatory Development and Good Governance*, (Paris, OECD, 1993), p. 9ff, Malena, Carmen; *Working with NGOs*, (World Bank, 1995), Sida; *Handlingsprogram för fred, demokrati och mänskliga rättigheter*, (Stockholm, Sida, 1997), p. 21

gathered from some standard works and from journals and magazines focusing on such questions.[3] Lastly, materials from donor organisations and international institutions have been used. It is the hope of the consultant that the list of references at the end of the paper will serve as a guide for readers interested in examining the sources directly.

In addition, the consultant has benefitted from conversations with Michael Boström (DESO/Sida) and Rigmor Mjörnell (LO/TCOs Biståndsnämnd), and participated in a seminar for youth leaders from various LDCs at the LSU.

Why Does Civil Society Matter?

Numerous beneficial effects have been ascribed to civil society. In the first place, independent organisations (often referred to as NGOs) receive attention for their actual output, be it human rights advocacy, rural cooperation, culture, information, or credit to the poor. In this view, civil society has arisen as an alternative to the state (and, in some views, to the market as well). These organisations are seen as holding a comparative advantage over other sectors on account of their scale, participation, voluntary commitment, democratic structure and general efficiency.[4] By channelling support through NGOs of various kinds, donors hope to escape both the inefficiency of the state and the inequality of the market. A growing amount of international aid has been channelled through such organisations in recent years, a trend which has been accompanied by a growing mistrust of the "developmental state".[5] Support for non-governmental organisations, accordingly, has risen in recent decades. As a proportion of total aid from the OECD, it rose from 0.7% in 1975 to 3.6% in 1985, and to a minimum of 5% in 1993-4.[6] It should be noted that the share of Swedish aid going to NGOs is even greater, by some calculations reaching figures as high as 30%.[7] The number of NGOs in the LDCs has risen as well, and it is impossible today to calculate their number. Some examples may serve to illustrate the case: in Nepal, the number of NGOs increased from 220 to 1,210 between 1990 and 1993; in Tunisia, their number rose from 1,886 in 1988 to 5,186 in 1991.[8]

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[3] Some of these are; *World Development, Journal of Democracy, Economic Development and Cultural Change, The Journal of Modern African Studies.*

[4] Malena, Carmen; *op. cit*, Brett, E.A.; "Voluntary Agencies as Developmental Organizations: Theorizing the Problem of Efficiency and Accountability", in *Development and Change*, vol. 24, 1993, pp. 269-303

[5] Holmén, Hans and Jirström, Magnus; *No Organizational Fixes: NGO's* [sic], *Institutions and Prerequisites for Development*, (Sida, Publications on Agricultural and Rural Development: n:o 4, Department for Natural Resources and the Environment, 1996)

[6] Edwards, Michael and Hulme, David; "Too Close for Comfort? The Impact of Official Aid on Nongovermental Organisations", in *World Development*, vol. 24, n:o 6, 1996, pp. 961-973

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid.

NGOs are undoubtedly a most important device in development aid, and the trend is certainly positive (although a number of studies question the efficiency of support to these organisations[9]). But such functions and tasks are not the primary focus of the present paper. Rather, we ask ourselves how support for such organisations may or may not be converted into support for civil society. During the last few years, the academic discourse has come to focus on civil society as a cornerstone in political and economic development. Still, the primary importance of these organisations is not, in my view, that of presenting alternatives to official aid channels. In taking this perspective, I focus not on the immediate tasks of such organisations; rather, I ask how said organisations can have the positive effects associated with civil society. Thus our focus will be on their function as agents in social and political interaction and development.

A division is maintained in this paper between the pluralist and educational functions of civil society. This, of course, is arbitrary; Göran Hydén, for example, has proposed a focus on four factors: challenging the state; providing means for popular participation; fostering a democratic culture; and providing a sphere for the discussion of political norms.[10] Still, both these and most other proposed factors can be placed under the heading of the two functions of civil society. Hydén's first two factors, for instance, can be placed under the heading of the pluralist function; his latter two under the heading of the educational function.

In current sociological and political-scientific discourse, the concept of "civil society" arose in connection with the "third wave of democratisation" that swept over the world from 1974 onwards.[11] A number of studies have accordingly argued that civil society--by putting pressure on authoritarian regimes and developing a democratic culture--has an effect on political democratisation.[12] Although political democratisation is a multifaceted phenomenon, in which international politics, economic trends and local groups blend, the organisations of civil society have played an important role in recent transitions to democracy. They have, among other things, organised demonstrations against the regimes, and have thus added an element of popular participation to the process.

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[9] See Holmén, Hans and Jirström, Magnus; *op. cit.*, and Riddell, Roger C. et als.; *Promoting Development by Proxy: An Evaluation of the Development Impact of Government Support to Swedish NGOs*, (Sida Evaluation Report, 1995/2)

[10] Hydén, Göran; *Assisting the Growth of Civil Society: How might it be improved?*, (Uppsala, Uppsala Studies in Democracy n:o 10, Department of Government, 1995), p. 7

[11] Huntington, Samuel P.; *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*, (Norman, University of Oklahoma Press, 1991)

A first line of argument stresses this articulating function of civil society. Autonomous organisations, it is argued, function to present and channel demands, and to pressure the state on behalf of individuals who are otherwise powerless. They serve as vehicles for mobilisation and collective action, and can thus counter-balance other forces in the state or the market. We may refer to this as the pluralist function of civil society. Although it is often articulated in connection with struggles for democracy, it is also of great importance within a democratic framework. To be effective, democracy must involve popular participation and interest, and it is here that civil society enters the game.

This argument builds on elements drawn from democratic theory. The democratic state must be balanced and checked by a plurality of forces in society, none of which is hegemonic. It is the pluralism of forces, interests and agents in society which serves as the foundation for liberal democracy.[13] The existence of such phenomena ensures that the state will not become plenipotentiary, while the difference between different groups means that no single group can impose its will on the others. Nicos Mouzelis points here to; "...its ability to check state arbitrariness from above, or mob rule from below".[14] Thus, what we expect from civil society are not isolated efforts to promote better governance, but the construction of a vital and vibrant array of organisations upon which democracy will thrive.

If the reasoning behind this first argument is quite easy to follow, that behind the second argument may seem less tangible. According to this view, civil society's beneficial effects are found less in its influence on the state than in the effects of cooperative work on the participating individuals, and on the ability of such individuals to sustain social relations. Scholars writing in this vein argue that civil society, by teaching cooperation and trust between individuals who come together for various purposes, generates "social capital", i.e., modes of social relations that facilitate coordinated action.[15] We may refer here, then, to the educational function of civil society.

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[12] See, for example, Diamond, Larry; "Towards Democratic Consolidation", in *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 5, n:o 3, July 1994, pp. 4-17

[13] For a discussion concerning pluralism, see; Dahl, Robert A.; *Dilemmas of Pluralist Democracy*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1982)

[14] Mouzelis, Nicos; "Modernity, Late Development and Civil Society", in Hall (ed.); *Civil Society: Theory, History and Comparison*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995), pp. 224-249, p. 237

[15] Blomkvist, Hans; "Social Structure and Political Action: Does Social Capital Matter?", in *Democracy and Social Capital in Segemented Societies: Working Papers from the Conference on Social Capital and Democracy at Toshali Sands, Orissa, India*, Agora Project, March 1996, pp. 3-22

This view can be traced back to Alexis de Tocqueville's classic study on North American democracy in the 1830s. The author argued that American democracy depended on the myriads of associations he found everywhere. As he noted: "Among the laws controlling human societies there is one more precise and clearer, it seems to me, than all the others. If men are to remain civilized or to become civilized, the art of association must develop and improve among them at the same speed as equality of condition spreads".[16] The alternative is tyranny and unlimited self-interest.

This view was reportedly held by many dissidents in the totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe[17], and it has received increased academic attention with the publication of Robert Putnam's book, *Making Democracy Work*. As this work has been at the forefront of academic discourse since its publication, it may be worthwhile to present its main features more extensively:

In a study concerning the efficiency of an administrative reform in Italy, the author finds sharp differences between northern and southern regions. He is able to show that these differences in institutional performance as (measured by a number of indicators, ranging from "Budget promptness" to "Day care centers" and "Bureaucratic responsiveness") correlate strongly with a "civic community index". This index is based on the number of associations (of a certain kind) and on patterns of information and voting. His concludes that, where civil society (as measured by the number of apolitical associations, among other things) has been strong, the state functions well, and where civil society has been weak (as in southern Italy), the state functions poorly. The existence of a civic community inspiring individuals to act as citizens vis-à-vis the state thus appears to be of the greatest importance for the working of the political and administrative systems. Putnam finds the clue to this pattern in the notion of "social capital"--the traditions and social norms facilitating cooperation and collective action. He then traces the differing histories of northern and southern Italy in this regard, in the process confirming the institutionalist view that social patterns change only with the greatest difficulty, and over long periods.

The importance attributed to the nature of social relations has since been echoed in numerous other studies, not all of them focusing on political and administrative efficiency. Francis Fukuyama traces economic efficiency, and the actual workings of a market economy, to a similar variable--the level of "trust" in a society--and couples this concept to the art of

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[16] de Tocqueville, Alexis, *Democracy in America*, (London, HarperCollins, [1835], 1994), p. 517

association.[18] He examines why societies meet with differing success under the same economic framework (a market economy). Why is it, for example, that "...the same industrial policy that leads to utter disaster in Latin America may prove effective, or at least not do any harm, in Asia"?[19] Reviewing a range of economies around the globe, he finds that economic reasoning must take cultural differences in account. A sense of community, shared norms, and moral values such as trust--social capital, in brief--appear fundamental for the workings of an economic system. His argument is essentially that a market economy is dependent for its proper functioning on the ability of actors within it to form groups for a common purpose; transaction costs can be lowered, moreover, when economic actors trust each other. Thus, societies with a high degree of inter-personal trust and sociability (Germany, the U.S. and Japan are his primary examples) have a comparative advantage over more atomised societies. His conclusion rests, finally, on a long-range perspective: "If the institutions of democracy and capitalism are to work properly, they must coexist with certain premodern cultural habits that ensure their proper functioning".[20]

Likewise, four authors writing for the UNDP argue that development efforts are aided greatly by social capital. They note that, "Without social capital, the other forms of capital cannot be maintained or used properly".[21] This concept therefore lies at the heart of what the UNDP refers to as "Sustainable Human Development". By this is meant development that "...provides the basis for restoring trust in social and political interactions. [...] ...it is the complexity and diversity of such non-coercive social regulation that hold societies together and gives them a humane character".[22]

A related argument is that civil society is important for the "empowerment" of different groups in society. This view can be seen as a more radical strand in the civil-society discourse, inasmuch as it stresses the necessity that civil society change the balance of power in social and economic relations.[23] The argument is that, through unity and organisation, the poor and powerless can come to constitute a popular force capable of changing society. At

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17 Smolar, Alexander; "From Opposition to Atomisation", in *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 7, n:o 1, January 1996, pp. 24-38

18 Fukuyama, Francis; *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, (London, Penguin, 1995), pp. 37-47

19 Ibid., p. 21

20 Ibid., p. 11

21 Banuri, Tariq et als.; *Sustainable Human Development*, (New York, UNDP, 1994), p. 18

22 Ibid., p. 7

23 See, for example, Chambers, Robert; *Challenging the Professions: Frontiers for rural development*, (London, Intermediate Technology Publications, 1993), p. 11

times, this particular view is transformed into a critique arguing that civil society, in order to become effective, must be politicised. We shall return to this argument below.

A common feature of all these views is that they see civil society as having essentially to do with cooperation. Voluntary cooperation between individuals counteracts atomistic tendencies, tends to build trust, and makes collective action possible. It is, accordingly, the ability to unite for a common purpose that is in question here. Obviously, cooperation is a feature of every human society; what we have in mind here, however, is spontaneous sociability beyond ethnic or parochial limits. Nor do we mean cooperation directed from above, i.e., by the state or other organisations. Some scholars have argued that such attempts are impossible. Take, for example, Mancur Olson's classic and pessimistic theory. Olson claims that, "...unless the number of individuals is quite small, or unless there is coercion or some other special device to make individuals act in their common interest, *rational self-interested individuals will not act to achieve their common or group interests*".[24] Here, then, enters the notion of social capital as a facilitating phenomenon.[25] According to this view, cooperation for mutual benefit is not a utopia the realisation of which is hindered by short-term self-interest, but instead a real possibility enabled by sentiments of community, shared norms and group feeling.

In line with this, the concept of civil society may also be said to imply modularity. By this Ernest Gellner means the social ability to join together in the accomplishment of various purposes.[26] Modularity is thus a residual category pertaining to relations between individuals in a social system. As such, it is to be distinguished from human capital, which is a personal quality.[27] The forms of joint action may vary: a cooperative, a political group, a social movement. What matters is the capacity to cooperate horizontally with persons outside one's own family and closed group in pursuit of a common good. (Albert Hirschman has described the same phenomenon as "social energy".) As Gellner pointedly puts it: "It is *this* which makes Civil Society: the forging of links which are effective even though they are flexible, specific, instrumental. It does indeed depend on a move from Status to Contract: it means that

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[24] Olson, Mancur; *The Logic of Collective Action*, (London, Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 2

[25] Coleman, James S.; *Foundations of Social Theory*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1990), chap. 12

[26] Gellner, Ernest; *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals*, (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1994), p. 97ff

[27] Hadenius, Axel; *Utveckling och Demokrati*, (Paper presented at the Congress of Nordic Scientists in Helsingfors, August 15-17, 1996)

men honour contracts even when they are not linked to ritualized status and group membership".[28]

The idea of civil society seems thus to resemble the notion of a well-functioning democracy. We have seen that, where civil society is present, the political, administrative and economic systems are more efficient. We can imagine a community of well-informed citizens ready to unite for common purposes, be they of a material or abstract nature. They join in a multitude of associations for such purposes, and a vibrant and vital civil society results. The political and economic life of such a community becomes more ordered and participatory as citizens create organisations able to place demands on the state and to hold it accountable (while no one organisation is strong enough to dominate the others). This produces a propensity for collective action, which may translate into the empowerment of the participants.

By contrast, the argument runs, the absence of such a community creates a different kind of society, one in which individuals do not look to their fellows for mutual benefit, and do not trust persons from outside their own family or ethnic group. In some cases we can speak of a mass society, in which independent associations are absent and populist political tendencies and totalitarian traits are present.[29] In other cases, vertical and hierarchical relations substitute for the horizontal associations of civil society, and clientelism frames political and economic relations in unequal structures. In all of these societies, the lack of organisations for mutual aid forces individuals to look to the state or to local strongmen for their survival.

Both of these last-mentioned arrangements cripple state efficiency. Joel Migdal describes the weak state found in most LDCs in these terms: "The ineffectiveness of state leaders who have faced impenetrable barriers to state predominance has stemmed from the nature of the societies they have confronted--from the resistance posed by chiefs, landlords, bosses, rich peasants, clan leaders, *za'im, effendis, aghas, caciques, kulaks*"....[30] This in turn produces a vicious circle: "...a society fragmented in social control affects the character of the state, which, in turn, reinforces the fragmentation of society".[31] Migdal's conclusion is summed up in four words: strong societies, weak states. Robert Putnam argues, *pace* Migdal, that a strong society influences economic and administrative performance in a positive

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[28] Gellner; *op. cit.*, p. 100

[29] Kornhauser, William; *The Politics of Mass Society*, (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960)

[30] Migdal, Joel S.; *Strong Societies and Weak States; State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*, (Princton, Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 33

[31] Ibid., p. 257

direction, so the conclusion is rather: "Strong society, strong economy; strong society, strong state".[32]

Actually, Putnam has no reason to mock Migdal's conclusion, for the truth is that these scholars are speaking of two entirely different models of society (the two just outlined). And the differing social relations produce highly dissimilar outcomes. Yet both must be seen as relatively stable. In the first case, because each individual benefits from the proper functioning of civil society. In the second, because no individual can attempt to break with the established patterns and to trust his fellows without thereby incurring the risk of being cheated, or being persecuted by the state and the strongmen. (Evidence of this tragic fact is abundant; suffice it to recall the fate of the Brazilian Chico Mendes, who was murdered for trying to organise the rural population.) This explains the persistence of these patterns.

Yet we must understand that the two examples outlined above are ideal types, in the sense that real societies do not exhibit traits from just one of these types, but rather present mixtures of the two. Our northern societies do not function that well (Putnam himself has recently presented evidence noting the vanishing of social capital in the U.S.[33]) and the situation in the south is not always so bleak (embryos of civil society exist in every nation). Such embryos have shown a capacity to grow, moreover, in many LDCs in recent years; this bodes well for development in these countries. Accordingly, supporting civil society should be a priority for both states and donors.

Criticisms of the Notion of Civil Society

In spite of the increased influence of the above-adumbrated notions, critics of the importance of civil society have not been lacking. We shall review some of their arguments below: in particular, those most disturbing for civil-society theory from a development perspective.

A fundamental and troubling aspect of the debate on civil society is that it may lead to a certain determinism.[34] Returning to Putnam's study, we find that he placed the roots of civil society in the Middle Ages. The response of one of the politicians in his study is worth recalling: "This is a counsel of despair! You're telling me that nothing I can do will improve

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[32] Putnam, Robert D.; *Making Democracy Work*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 176

[33] Putnam, Robert D.; Bowling Alone: *Democracy in America at the End of the Twentieth Century*, (Paper presented that the Nobel Symposium: Democracy's Victory and Crisis, Uppsala, August 27-30, 1994)

[34] Hall, John P.; "In Search of Civil Society", in Hall (ed.); *Civil Society: Theory, History and Comparison*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995), pp. 1-31, p. 9

our prospects for success. The fate of the reform was sealed centuries ago".[35] That would indeed be Putnam's conclusion: in his view, institutional changes capable of producing a civil society are a question of centuries. As John Hall has noted, some approaches to civil society may land on a certain historical determinism in distinguishing between societies with and without social capital.[36]

A related argument builds on the specifically (West) European roots of civil society in city-states, free peasants and religious toleration.[37] The spread of civil society to regions lacking these historical conditions is thus seen as difficult, perhaps impossible. Other scholars simply note that exporting a concept across space and time would seem to be very difficult, and that civil society cannot be expected to work in Africa (for example) as it does in Europe.[38] Nor can we study it in both settings from the same theoretical points of departure. A related argument is that the theory of civil society smacks of ethnocentrism, for it presents northern societies as successful, and their southern counterparts as inefficient and inherently weak.

Such views are indeed troubling from a development perspective, yet more positive evidence is present. Although they have many problems, a great many civil organisations have arisen in different parts of the world over the last decade. In Latin America, in fact, the term "grassroots explosion" has even been used to describe this trend.[39] We shall return to these examples below when discussing experiences of support.

Another point of criticism is that the theory of civil society is internally inconsistent. We have seen that the discussion about social capital claims that civil society may actually reinforce the state, and help it to become more effective. This argument may therefore run counter to the first proposition above, which sees civil society as a counter-balance to the state.[40] This is troubling, for it points to the fact that we do not in fact possess enough evidence about the relationship between civil society and the state. (This discussion holds wider implications as well. If we assume that civil society enhances the efficiency of the state, will it have this effect

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[35] Cited in Putnam; *Making Democracy...*, p. 183

[36] Hall; op. cit., p. 9

[37] Hall; *op. cit.*

[38] See, for example, Monga, Célestin; "Civil Society and Democratisation in Francophone Africa", in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 33, n:o 3, 1995, pp. 359-379

[39] Term from Castañeda, Jorge G.; *Utopia Unarmed*, (New York, Vintage Books, 1994)

[40] Foley, Michel W. and Edwards, Bob; "The Paradox of Civil Society", in *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 7, n:o 3, July 1996, pp. 38-52

on any state, even an authoritarian one? Fukuyama noted that Japan, along with Germany, probably exhibits the highest degree of spontaneous sociability, yet the history of these countries leaves a good deal to be desired as regards democracy and tolerance. Such a view finds empirical support in Berman's article on civil society in the Weimar Republic, in which the author notes: "Perhaps, therefore, associationism should be considered a politically neutral multiplier, neither inherently good nor inherently bad, but rather dependent for its effects on the wider political context".[41])

The discussion about possible conflicts between different functions of civil society may apply to the internal structure of organisations as well. There may even be a trade-off between the pluralist function and the educational one. In order to be effective in articulating its demands and fighting for its interests, a pyramid-shaped, hierarchically structured organisation may prove the most efficient, yet such a structure may diminish the desired promotion of democratic values.[42] On the other hand, a broadly based association with a high level of internal democracy may be less swift, efficient, and responsive to change.[43]

These criticisms fasten on the internal contradictions of the theory, but an external critique is possible too. According to Mancur Olson's classic theory, well-organised interest groups will only serve the interests of their members; in so doing, they endanger the common good.[44] Instead of "civil society", then, Olson sees a number of associations jealously guarding their privileges, and trying to grab a bigger share of the common cake. What we can expect when such groups lobby and put pressure on the state, therefore, is a sub-optimal outcome endangering economic efficiency and development. In the same vein, other observers ascribe the spectacular development of some East Asian nations to the state's insulation from society—which often take the form of a non-responsive authoritarian regime.[45] Acccording to this view, strong groups in civil society are a threat to the overall well-being of a nation; in order to develop, therefore, the state must keep aloof from such groups.

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[41] Berman, Sheri; "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic", in *World Politics*, 49 (April 1997), pp. 401-429, p. 427

[42] Michels study is a classic in this regard: Michels, Robert; *Organisationer och Demokrati*, (Uppsala, Ratio, [1911] 1983)

[43] Tarrow, Sidney; *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Actions and Politics*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 149f

[44] Argument from *Rise and Decline of Nations*, cited in Putnam; *Making Democracy...*, p. 176

[45] Gunnarsson, Christer and Rojas, Mauricio; *Tillväxt, Stagnation, Kaos*, (Stockholm, SNS Förlag, 1995), p. 103ff discusses this argument

As it constitutes a mirror image of civil-society theory, this argument is indeed troubling. Fukuyama discusses it in his book, and concludes that we must weigh the beneficent effects of social capital against the costs for economic efficiency imposed by lobbies and pressure groups.[46]

A last point to consider is the extent to which a politicisation of civil society is desirable. Some researchers have criticised the theory of civil society for overlooking the necessity of politicising the organisations of civil society. A related problem is that those who champion such organisations as the generators of social capital often argue that civil society must be separated from the political sphere; yet the result may be gravely to undermine the influence of civil society on the state.[47] An alternative approach would be to focus on the political impact of social movements. (The concept of empowerment may be said to accord with such an approach.) Underlying this critique is often the assumption that civil society, in order to be effective, must battle the existing unequal distribution of power resources in society. It must, in this view, become radicalised; it must aim at the transformation of society by means of "the propagation of demands about general social interests".[48] This can be achieved through politicisation.[49] This line of argument runs counter to Putnam's view, as he actually chose not to consider politically inspired movements noting that political action is not by itself an indicator of civicness.[50] But, this line of criticism runs, a 'deepening' of civil society must occur if civil society is to have a democratising effect. Civil society must aspire, in other words, to propose a political project. We shall return to this matter below (albeit from a slightly different point of view).

Civil society, What Is It?

Having seen the beneficial impact of a well-functioning civil society, we may ask ourselves what accounts for this favourable effect. When considering the critique of the idea of civil society, we saw that it often relied on questioning what civil society is and what it ought to be-

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[46] Fukuyama; *op. cit.*, p. 158

[47] Foley and Edwards ; *op. cit.*

[48] Gibbon, Peter; "Some Reflections on 'Civil Society' and Political Change", in Rudebeck and Törnquist (eds.); *Democratisation in the Third World*, (Uppsala, The Seminar for Development Studies, 1996), pp. 21-50, p. 38

[49] Törnquist, Olle; *Making Democratisation Work*; (Uppsala, Research Programme on Popular Movements, Development and Democratisation, 1997)

[50] Putnam; *Making Democracy...*, p. 109

-internally democratic organisations, politically inspired movements, etc.? We have accordingly reached the simple question: what are we actually talking about?

Upon reviewing the literature, we find a wide array of definitions of civil society. One of the most common focuses on the social sphere between state and family. According to another definition, however, civil society and the market must be separated. A third view has it that only some social organisations qualify as civil. In operational terms, this has often come to signify, in the development discourse, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in particular. An alternative claim is that the concept must be assessed historically, by reference to its different philosophical strands (whether derived from Locke, Hobbes, de Tocqueville or Hegel).

In what follows, I argue that the exact definition of civil society is not of any great interest *per se*. It is the practical implications of the definition that matter.

The question at hand is the following: what organisations and/or institutions are we talking about in connection with the support for civil society? It appears clear that not all such organisations and institutions have a beneficial impact on economic and political development. Reviewing the two different kinds of society above, we saw that some traditional institutions, such as clientelistic arrangements, are often part of the problem. Moreover, certain organisations may actually hinder the development of civil society, such as criminal associations or intolerant organisations (the KKK, Sendero Luminoso, etc.) As Laura Renshaw has noted, we need to understand that we should not support civil society *per se*, but rather those parts of it that appear to promote our broader goals (such as increased equality, democracy and non-discrimination).[51] We argued above that, in addition to its primary purpose, an organisation of the desired type--a rural cooperative, a rotating credit association, a theatre group, an organisation for legal help, etc.--may be able to promote the broader purposes of democratisation. For such organisations articulate demands, represent their members vis-à-vis other actors, and build social capital. Adopting this perspective clarifies the conceptual discussion above. In supporting civil society, we are trying to promote these effects, and we are searching for associations and organisations that may produce them. This shows that the distinction between civil society and the market, for example, is hard to maintain. The famous Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, for instance, is a market actor, inasmuch

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[51] Renshaw, Laura; "Strenghtening Civil Society: the role of NGOs", in *Development*, 1994:4, pp. 46-49

as it provides economic credit to its members, i.e., acts as a financial institution. But studies has shown that, due to its participatory structure and its focus on group-building, it also promotes voting and undermines clientelism.[52] The argument for regarding civil society as separate from the market would appear, then, to be superficial. What should primarily concern us is not be the formal definition of civil society, but its practical implications and how these may be furthered.

The question is which organisations qualify as beneficial, and how these are to be structured in order to promote the above-mentioned goals. A number of suggestions have been offered in this regard. I consider them below under the following headings: Functions; Internal structure; External relations; Recruitment; and Autonomy. (The reader should note, however, that we can seldom hope to find organisations complying fully with all these conditions. The headings indicated may, nevertheless, give us some idea of what to look for.)

With regard to the functions of these organisations, we find a wide array of suggestions. For example, a USAID assessment of support for civil society in El Salvador claims that only autonomous organisations aiming to influence state policy can be regarded as part of civil society.[53] Yet we saw above that some organisations may not consider influencing the state to be one of their primary tasks. In fact, Putnam consciously limited his studies to organisations without political, economic or ecumenical purposes, and ended up with an array of sports, cultural and leisure associations. Obviously, the difference in approach can be traced to the relative importance ascribed to the different purposes of civil society. The USAID study focuses on the pluralist function; Putnam stresses the importance of social capital.

We saw above that the notion of civil society relates closely to cooperation. The question can therefore be posed: for what tasks will people cooperate? A World Bank study claims that material incentives are most important here.[54] This can be seen in the case of infrastructural projects such as irrigation or the maintenance of a common resource. As we noted in an earlier study: "Not only do all of these institutions focus on a common material asset. They also share other characteristics making them especially favourable for the

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[52] Fuglesang, Andreas and Chandler, Dale; *Participation as Process: What We Can Learn from Grameen Bank,* (Oslo, NORAD, n.d.)

[53] Blair, Harry et als.; *Civil Society and Democratic Development in El Salvador: A CDIE Assessment,* mimeo, 1995

[54] The World Bank; *Poverty Reduction in South Asia: Promoting Participation ofr the Poor,* (Washington D.C., The World Bank, 1994)

establishment of horizontal institutions; their membership is quite limited, for instance, and both the higher and the lower levels of the organisation tend to have natural boundaries". Furthermore, the influence of such groups probably goes beyond the mere administration of a common asset. As noted in an UNRISD report: "...cooperatives with the least political or social content, being mainly concerned with straightforward economic benefits, may in the end [...] have a greater impact than those that explicitly but ineffectively seek to transform society".[55] This conclusion may be a bit hasty, however. In a quantitative study on local organisations around the world, Milton Esman and Norman Uphoff showed that, although organisations relying on material benefits generally perform well, they do less well when it comes to reducing social and sexual discrimination. Still, these organisations show a high influence on participation in decision-making, on both official and community levels.[56]

Even as these findings are important, we must realise that they do not suffice as a basis for advocating just one set of organisations. The very notion of a vital and vibrant civil society implies a plurality of associations and tasks. Material incentives appear important for the genesis of civil organisations, but they are far from supplying the only motivations. Fighting for human rights, mobilising for the environment, etc. have also been important for getting cooperation started. The fundamental focus, furthermore, must not be on the interests of the individual; rather, as Sidney Tarrow has noted: "The most common denominator of social movements is thus interest; but interest is no more than an objective category imposed by the observer. It is participants' *recognition* of their common interest that translates the potential for movement into collective action".[57] This common interest may of course be materialised in numerous ways, relating to a variety of tasks and needs. Indeed, there are organisations forming part of civil society even while not claiming to. Harry Blair notes, in a case study of Bangladesh, that even organisations with a more limited view of their actions are vital participants; like the economic actors in Adam Smith's model of the invisible hand, they may foster the effects associated with civil society without intending to.[58]

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[55] UNRISD; *Rural Co-operatives as Agents of Change: A Research Report and a Debate*, (Geneva, UNRISD, 1975), cited in Holmén and Jirström, *op. cit.*, p. 31

[56] Esman, Milton J. and Uphoff Norman T.; *Local Organizations: Intermediaries in Rural Development*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 92-98

[57] Tarrow; *op. cit.*, p. 5

[58] Blair, Harry; *Civil Society, Democratic Development and International Donors: A Case Study from Bangladesh*, (paper presented at the American Political Science Association, New York, 1-4 September, 1994), p. 23

It would appear easier to say something conclusive about the model of a favourable internal structure. We noted above that there may be a trade-off between the benefits yielded by hierarchical groups and those produced by participatory ones. Still, evidence exists which appears to contradict this hypothesis. Esman and Uphoff find, for instance, that more participatory styles tend to be be accompanied by organisational efficiency--indeed a striking conclusion.[59] Still, they define "participatory" simply as the use of assemblies for decision-making. Nevertheless, their finding allows us to hope that Michel's "iron law of oligarchy" can be overcome.[60] Indeed, this finding is a strong argument for the beneficial effects of civil society, inasmuch as the joint action of individuals apparently translates into greater efficiency than does a top-down structure.

Another of Esman and Uphoff's more surprising results relates to the same question; I refer to their finding that more formal practices tend to be associated with organisations which are less successful--be it in the educational, economic or social realms.[61] More informal methods tend, then, actually to improve efficiency. Thomas Carroll reports the same result in his study of intermediary organisations. Drawing on evidence from a number of intermediary organisations in Latin America, he concludes that informal practices are more effective at bringing beneficiaries closer to the organisation.[62] (Still, it must be noted that it is hard to create new organisations that rely on informal practices; more likely, the success of such attempts involves drawing on already existing social capital.)

A last variable to consider here is the relative size of the organisation. Since the idea is to get groups to cooperate for a common purpose, and to build trust among participants, we would expect smaller groups to be more advantageous. Indeed, there is empirical support for this expectation. Esman and Uphoff find that smaller groups tend to function better in respect to a number of variables, such as participation and the absence of discrimination.[63] On the other hand, the correlation was not that strong, and the relationship was an inverse one in the case of a number of other variables, such as the effect on education and on income for the poor. Yet a case can be made that returns from scale are obtained in the case of such variables, so a larger organisation may have more favourable effects. The evidence is thus mixed.

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[59] Esman and Uphoff; *op. cit.*, p. 145 and table 5-15

[60] Michel's "iron law of oligarchy" states that all organisations, by necessity, tend towards oligarchy.

[61] Ibid., p. 142ff and table 5-17

[62] Carroll, Thomas F.; *Intermediary NGOs: The Supporting Link in Grassroots Development*, (West Hartford, Kumarian Press, 1992), p. 136

[63] *Op. cit.*, table 5-16

Notwithstanding this note of caution, however, we may conclude that, according to a systematic comparison, organisations which are smaller, less formal, and more participatory tend to function better in civil society. As noted above, this seemingly paradoxical phenomenon can be explained from within civil-society theory itself. In the social structures of civil society, cooperation between participants is easier to start and to maintain, and social capital is enhanced. The result is to bolster efficiency. But, what does this tell us about the pluralist effects of civil society? Will not a wide array of small and informal organisations be relatively powerless? Even if the above-noted characteristics are beneficial from the standpoint of social capital (note that Putnam himself focuses exactly on small organisations which probably make use of informal practices), the result may be to limit the political influence of civil organisations. Once again, we confront here the dilemma of the two functions of civil society.

As far as practical examples are concerned, however, we may come closer to a conclusion if we link internal structure to the external relations of civil society. In a discussion of the genesis of social movements, Sidney Tarrow notes that national social movements in most cases rely on small groups and communities for mobilisation.[64] On the other hand, Renshaw notes that, in the Philippines, there are over 20,000 officially registered NGOs, a fact which ought to indicate a most viable civil society; notwithstanding this, however, civil society in the Philippines appears to be impotent.[65] She draws the conclusion that organisations are but the building blocks of civil society. We must also consider relations at the national level.

An argument can thus be built around the importance of the higher-level organisations which combine and coordinate the demands of the small, local organisations. This is indeed one of Esman and Uphoff's conclusions: "The strategy of having fairly small, homogenous base organizations linked to higher levels of organization permits agencies assisting [Local Organizations] to pursue the advantages of one of our most interesting findings; that informal [Local Organisation] roles and procedures seem advantageous".[66]

Julie Fisher has argued, moreover, that organisational structures that link lower and higher levels may in some cases offset the risk for elite domination, by providing other fora

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[64] Tarrow; *op. cit.*, p. 135f

[65] Renshaw, Laura; *Strenghtening Civil Society: the role of NGOs*, longer version of the article quoted above.

[66] *Op. cit.*, p. 261

for participation and access to other sources of information.[67] This view finds support in the studies of Mexican peasant organisations conducted by Jonathan Fox. He claims that a structure with several levels, and and with sub-groups between the elite and the membership, tends to generate greater participation and accountability.[68]

A strong case can thus be made for a structure of civil organisations across a range of levels, linking the close cooperation of small groups to proper social movements that offer instruments for coordination and the channeling of demands. (It is interesting to note that this finding presents a parallel to the theory of civil society. Just as something is needed between individuals and the state in order for the latter to become democratic, we need groups between the elite and the membership if an organisation is to function democratically.) If so, both the pluralist and educational functions of civil society may be fulfilled. Note that many of the most successful grassroots organisations are structured in this way. In a highly schematic way, this can be described as follows:

Figure 1.1
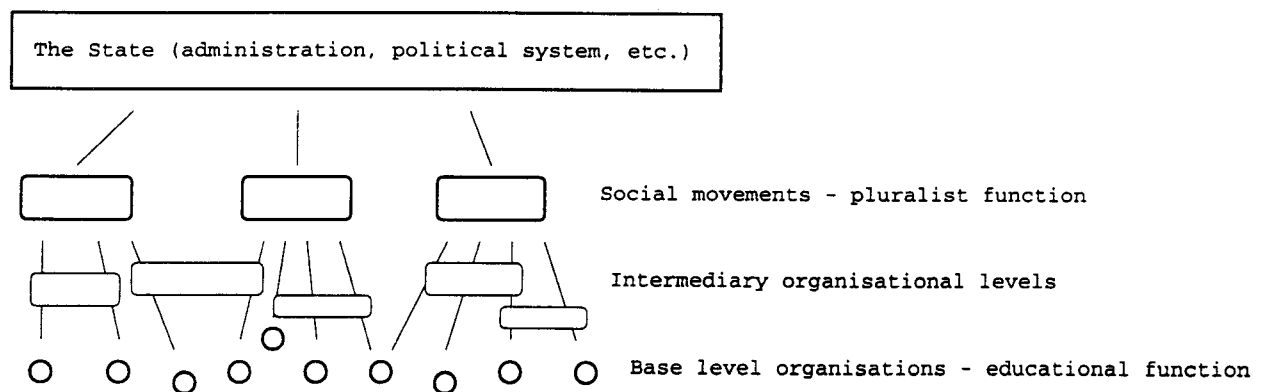
Having discussed how a well-functioning civil society may be organised, we turn now to its process of recruitment. A theoretical argument for open recruitment is easy to make, in view of the risks inherent in associations based on ethnicity or religion. An civil society that cross-cuts existing cleavages is sometimes suggested as a remedy for the potential intolerance and violence of such organisations. Some scholars have therefore made open recruitment a condition of civil-organisation status.[69] Still, organising on the grounds of a common belonging may prove much easier than building heterogeneous organisations, for participants in the former case can rely on an existing spirit of community and trust. Religiously or

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[67] Fisher, Julie; "Is the Iron Law of Oligarchy Rusting Away in the Third World", in *World Development*, vo. 22, n:o 2, pp. 129-143, 1994, p. 138

[68] Fox, Jonathan; "Democratic Rural Development", in *Development and Change*, vol. 23, n:o 2, pp. 1-36, 1992, p. 26ff

ethnically homogenous groups also tend to be more capable of withstanding adverse conditions, due to their greater internal solidarity.[70] In a discussion of African civil society, on the other hand, E. Gyimah-Boadi notes that kin-based and religious groups "...are inherently exclusionary, often chauvinistic, and sometimes jingoistic. Their unwillingness or inability to enter into alliances with other groups is a leading cause of the pervasive fragmentation of civil society in Africa".[71] The author notes, furthermore, that such practices threaten to influence other organisations as well.

Evidence about the nature of such groups is thus mixed. Still, we do well to keep in mind Larry Diamond's note of caution: The pluralism of civil society presupposes the lack of groups aspiring to a hegemonic position. What we should watch out for, therefore, is intolerant organisations.[72]

A last point to consider concerns the relation of civil society to the state. Although the very definition of civil society stems from its autonomy from the state, this is in most cases a relative concept.[73] Most organisations need to relate to the state if they are to be able to present demands and put pressure on the administrative structures. Still, organisations in civil society must hold a certain degree of autonomy if they are to be effective in balancing and controlling the state. Some organisations which are intermediate between the state and civil society can be discerned; these are sometimes referred to as QUANGOs, or quasi-non governmental organisations. Although such organisations may enhance the level of social capital, by bringing people together under the aegis of the state, they are most likely to increase dependency on the state, or even to increase the power of the state relative to society. Vivienne Shue has found evidence of this in China: "There can be little doubt that in the very act of overcoming the enforced cellularization of the past, these associations are playing a role in strengthening and empowering the social groups they represent (or speak for) in the Chinese system. But it seems just as clear that the party-state itself, in its information gathering, policy planning, and even in its policy implementation modes, may also be

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[69] Hadenius, Axel and Uggla, Fredrik; "Making Civil Society Work, Promoting Democratic Development: What Can States and Donors Do?", in *World Development*, vol. 24, n:o 10, 1996, pp. 1621-1639,

[70] Esman and Uphoff; *op. cit.*, p. 206

[71] Gyimah-Boadi, E.; "Civil Society in Africa", in *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 7, n:o 2, April 1996, pp. 118-132, p. 129

[72] Diamond; "Rethinking Democratic Consolidation: Toward Democratic Consolidation", in *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 5, n:o 3, July 1994, pp. 4-17, p. 6f

[73] Ibid.

strengthened (i.e., empowered) by these new arrangements".[74] (This quotation can also be read as a justification for the argument above that civil society enhances efficiency, whether the state in question be democratic or not.)

As we have seen, the importance of civil-society theory is based in part on its view of state-society relations, which it does not regard as antagonistic by definition, but rather as potentially reinforcing. Therefore, and this will be a recurring theme in the rest of this paper, we cannot leave the state out of a serious analysis of civil society. The administrative and political systems condition the potential of civil society in a high degree. The relation of civil society to the state depends on the nature of the latter. In this respect there is a fundamental difference between democratic and authoritarian arrangements.[75] It is only in the former case that we can expect this positive relationship. In authoritarian settings, the state is not likely to accept independent organisations, at least not those with a political impact, and in totalitarian states the state will try to substitute its official organisations for a true civil society.[76]

On the other hand, relations must not become too close even under a democratic state. State-dominated organisations have been a frequent phenomenon in many LDCs, and they have often ended up weakening civil society. They have helped to undermine horizontal relationships between citizens, internal accountability, and the potential to check state power. Esman and Uphoff find, for instance, that the more directed organisations performed notably worse than their more autonomous counterparts. They note as well, however, that the relationship between performance and autonomy is unusually bimodal, i.e., both highly independent and highly directed associations perform poorly.[77] The ideal thus seems to lie in the middle, where we find organisations that are neither directed from above nor fully autonomous (in the sense of refusing any and all dealings with the state).[78]

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[74] Shue, Vivienne; "State Power and Social Organization in China", in Migdal, Kohli and Shue (eds.); *State Power and Social Forces*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 63-88, p. 83

[75] Törnquist; *op. cit.*, p. 3

[76] Perlmutter, Amos; *Modern Authoritarianism: A Comparative Institutional Analysis*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1981), p. 7ff

[77] *Op. cit.*, p. 153

[78] When we refer to autonomy it is usually a couple of features we have in mind - all related to the control over the organisation. An organisation that relies on its own sources of finance, elects its own officials and decides its own tasks may be called autonomous, in that it does not depend on other actors for its actions. Still, all cases are not as straight-forward. Many associations depend on official registration for acceptance and ability to raise memberships fees. Here is one instance where the independence of an organisation may be circumscribed.

In what ways, then, can state structures promote independent organisations? Apart from direct support (which will endanger the autonomy of such organisations), the possibility of civil society depends on the environment. We can find a number of institutional structures which appear favourable in this regard. In her global study of associations for common resource administration, Elinor Ostrom notes that, among other factors, a well-functioning official system for enforcement and conflict resolution lowers the transaction costs for creating associations among the potential beneficiaries. Her conclusion, which is of great importance for the present discussion, is that: "Individuals who are not able to supply new rules [for the joint administration of a common resource] in an indifferent setting may succeed in adopting new rules under a political regime that allows local autonomy, invests in enforcement agencies, and provides generalized institutional-choice and conflict-resolution arenas. In other words, regional and national governments can play an positive role in providing facilities to enhance the ability of local appropriators to engage in effective institutional design".[79]

As we see from this quotation, a number of arrangements appear to foster civil society. In the first place, the state must create arenas open to the operation of independent organisations.[80] In addition, a well-functioning bureaucracy operating according to legal-rationalistic guidelines appears crucial for the access and rightful treatment of the organisations in civil society. Furthermore, the judiciary system is crucial to consider. Establishing institutions that allow for the official settlement of conflicts can substantially lower the costs associatied with creating and maintaining an independent organisation. Furthermore, the legal system must provide channels through which independent organisations may act and come forth with demands and actions.[81]

These are just some examples. We shall return below to the question of how support for administrative reform cam also serve to strengthen civil society.

We noted at the start that the concept of civil society arose at the same time that the "third wave of democratisation" swept around the globe. In numerous transitions to democracy, the organisations of civil society stood at the forefront of the struggle against the authoritarian regime. Still, evidence also shows that, paradoxically, the very same organisations run into

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[79] Ostrom, Elinor; *Governing the Commons*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 212

[80] Garretón; Manuel Antonio; "New State-Society Relations in Latin America", in Bradford (ed.); *Redefining the State in Latin America*, (Paris, OECD, 1994), pp. 239-249, p. 245

[81] Clark, John; *Democratising Development*, (London, Earthscan Publications, 1991), p. 111

serious problems after the transition to democracy.[82] This has been true even in nations–such as Chile and South Africa–where the authoritarian period saw the emergence of a most vibrant civil society. A number of explanations have been offered for this unfortunate situation. On the one hand, these movements tend to lose many of their leaders to the new, democratic administrations. External funding also wanes in many cases. Lastly, the transition has meant that many civil organisations have had to change their way of relating to the state, a change that seems hard to do as it often touches on the very identity of the organisation. Born of the struggle against a repressive state apparatus, such organisation how had to stop regarding the state as the adversary and start seeing it as a potential partner.[83] This has clearly caused problems for the strategies and imageries of many organisations.

The importance of a well-functioning political system has often been discussed in connection with this. As noted above, the effects of a politicisation of civil society have been the subject of great debate. Excessive politicisation often creates problems for civil society, but, on the other hand, representative democracy relies on political parties to coordinate and channel demands. Parties thus constitute an important link between civil society and the state. Philip Oxhorn has argued that the general absence of well-functioning political parties in Latin America lies at the heart of the contemporary problems in forging stable relations between the state and civil society on that continent.[84] His argument thus echoes Judith Adler Hellman's claim that theorists and activists in new social movements have stressed autonomy too much, and that a closer linkage with political parties may instead provide them with more political power.[85] Likewise, Sheri Berman notes in a recent article that it was the failure of the German party system that let the rich associational life of the Weimar Republic fall in the hands of the Nazis, and provided a breeding-ground for the latter.[86]

The problem is obviously delicate. Not all parties will serve as the necessary link between the social and political spheres. The risks that social movements and independent

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[82] For evidence from Africa see; Gyimah-Boadi, E.; *op. cit.*, James, Wilmot and Caliguire, Daria; "Renewing Civil Society", in *Journal of Democracy*, vo. 7, n:o 1, January 1996, pp. 56-66, from Latin America; Oxhorn, op. cit., Canel, Eduardo; "Democratization and the Decline of Urban Social Movements in Uruguay: A Political-Institutional Account"; in Escobar and Alvarez (eds.); *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America*, (Boulder, Westview Press, 1992), pp. 276-290, from Eastern Europe; Smolar, Aleksander; *op. cit.*

[83] Monga; *op. cit.*, p. 374ff

[84] Oxhorn, Philip; "From Controlled Inclusion to Coerced Maginalization: The Struggle for Civil Society in Latin America", in Hall; *op. cit.*, pp. 250-277

[85] Adler Hellman, Judith; "New Social Movements and the Question of Autonomy", in Alvarez and Escobar (eds.); *The Making of Social Movements in Latin America*, (Boulder, Westview Press, 1992), pp. 52-61

[86] Berman, *op. cit.*

organisations will be co-opted in the support of populist and elite-centred political parties is obvious.[87] What is needed, then, are political parties that allow for participation while also serving as instruments for the coordination of demands and the mediation of conflicts. This is obviously quite far-off in many Third World countries.

These last points may appear vague, but in this they reflect the current discourse. The discussion about how relations between civil society on the one hand, and the state and the political parties on the other, ought to be structured are complicated, and the research on this subject is still quite limited. Yet it is an important subject to consider, and it also shows that civil society cannot be considered in isolation, but only in relation to the economic, social and political framework.[88] This is a point that we stress below, when discussing the possibilities of support.

Experience of Support

As noted above, the focus on civil society can lead to a certain determinism, inasmuch as systems of social relations are portrayed as changing only with the greatest difficulty. This is the view of Putnam, for instance. If this is correct, it is obviously troubling if our purpose is to aid civil society in particular, and development in general. A fundamental question is therefore: is the development of a civil society possible?

Contrary to the determinist view, fortunately there are examples of the evolution of civil society even within quite limited time-spans. Víctor Pérez-Díaz, for example, has described how a vital and well-functioning Spanish civil society has come into being just during the most recent decades.[89] Similar developments, though less successful, now seem to be taking place around the world.[90]

A slightly different question is whether aid can promote the development of civil society. As good as all the authors cited in this paper point to the fact that social development is an indigenous phenomenon, and that social capital cannot be called into being from above. Yet very few of them would likely aver that it is totally impossible to foster such a

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[87] Diamond; *op. cit.*

[88] Migdal, Joel S.; "The State in society: An approach to struggles for domination", in Migdal, Kohli, Shue; *op. cit.*, pp. 7-34

[89] Pérez-Díaz, Víctor; *The Return of Civil Society: The Emergence of Democratic Spain*, (London, Harvard University Press, 1993), ch. 1

[90] See Bennett, Vivienne; "Urban Popular Movements in Mexico, 1968-1988", in Alvarez and Escobar; *op. cit.*, pp. 240-259, for one account of such a process.

development externally. These processes appear vulnerable and difficult to assess, but we do know enough to be able to draw some conclusions of how aid may be of great use.

First we shall mention one observation that is of great interest, and which indeed is hopeful for the development of civil society. In reviewing cooperative projects in Latin America, Albert Hirschman notes that individual projects have fostered--even when they were not immediately successful--numerous attempts at reproducing their experience. Hirschman attributes this to the "social energy" to which these experiences give rise (a concept similar to that of social capital).[91] The point is that civil society does appear to spread rapidly once examples of horizontal organisation have been established. This finding, which obviously holds out hopes for efforts to support civil society, has a simple theoretical rationale in Axelrod's observation that cooperative modes of relation tend to prevail over egoistic ones.[92]

What evidence do we possess, then, about the prospects for strengthening civil society? As noted repeatedly, we all but lack systematic studies in this area; Esman and Uphoff's is one of the very few exceptions. What we have in the way of evidence does not exactly point to the evolution of a viable and vibrant civil society at the national level. Such a development would be difficult to assess, and impossible to ascribe to the efforts of donors. What we do have is evidence concerning particular projects, such as the naam-movement in Burkina Faso, the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, the Gal Oya project in Sri Lanka, the Christian Base Communities in Brazil, and so on. While these projects are not always perfect, they do point towards ways of supporting the building blocks of civil society. (One troubling feature is that some successful projects, such as the Grameen Bank, tend to be examined over and over in the discourse.)

Without immersing myself in the particulars of individual projects, I shall indicate some characteristics and practises of successful projects that, in spite of the highly varied conditions presented by different regions, tend to attract attention time and again. A number of considerations stand out in these projects:

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[91] Hirschman, Albert O.; *Getting Ahead Collectively: Grassroots Experiences in Latin America*, (Elmsford, Pergamon Press Inc., 1984)

[92] Axelrod, Robert; *Från konflikt till samverkan*, (Stockholm, SNS Förlag, 1987)

- Many aim to provide enabling conditions rather than direct support. Such efforts can include education and capacity-building, provide access to mechanisms for conflict-resolution, or other goods that may lower the costs of forming independent associations. One Swedish example of this comes from Utan Gränser/Swedish Cooperative Centre.[93] In a number of projects, they have concentrated their support on capacity-building efforts. They have, for instance, provided information about the existing legal framework to the members of cooperatives (in Ethiopia). Other projects have aimed at educating members and leaders in business-planning, leadership and equality (as in Uganda). As these projects have aimed at the evolution of new skills, we may say that they aim at building up the capacity of potential members and leaders. Thus, they do not direct the organisation, but rather contribute the knowledge and skills necessary for local initiatives. Other measures may include providing credit for tasks which smaller groups in the organisation select for themselves. Support structured in this way may provide for joint local efforts and initiatives, even under the aegis of outside support.

- Most of these projects are well-adapted to local traditions and cultural practises. Even as new organisations are created, they have to adapt to their context to be viable. Indeed, this would seem a fundamental requisite for the success of efforts in this area.[94] As one scholar notes, it can be seen as relying on "available social capital".[95] One example of how this can be done may be seen in Bolivia, where the formation of trade unions drew on the familiar and direct democratic practises of the traditional "ayllus".[96]

Indeed, this touches on a fundamental point in the discussion about supporting civil society. In contrast to many other development projects, effort to create civil society must be internally generated. True, donors can do a great deal to help, but we must avoid believing that "...development can be socially engineered [...] The technicalities of project design must be subordinated to other important objectives, notably how the potential beneficiaries related to the activity and how their involvement and cooperation can be assured".[97] This is particularly true in the case of civil society. Top-down approaches, low degrees of local participation and so on, may actually contradict the very purpose--to get people to collaborate for common purposes. Social capital and civil society mainly consist of relations between individuals in

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[93] Utan Gränser/Swedish Cooperative Centre; *1995/1996 års verksamhet*, p. 5ff

[94] Howes; Mick; "NGOs and the Development of Local Institutions: a Ugandan Case-Study", in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 35, n:o 1, 1997, pp. 17-35

[95] Ibid.

[96] Dirven, Martine; "Rural Society: Its Intergration and Disintergration", in *CEPAL Review*, n:o 51 December 1993, p. 80

similar conditions. Therefore their strengthening cannot be likened to aid for infrastructural or human capital. The creation of social capital is by necessity an indigenous phenomenon which, even as donors attempt to aid it, must arise among the beneficiaries.

- Still, we must note that, even as we keep this in mind (and it should not be forgotten), external agents can play an important role even in building organisations. Esman and Uphoff proposed working through "catalysators", or promoters. These are individual outside agents who try actively to build group cooperation by educating, organising, contacting officials, etc.[98] As is easily seen, this kind of support will foremost be of use in the cases where no previous organisation exists. Examples exist of how such promotors can constitute a most important device in aid for local organisation.[99] Howes has described how locally recruited "Rural Development Workers" in Uganda were educated as part of a community development program, after which they were sent out to organise savings associations.[100] Bryan Burns describes how the use of such agents (in some of his examples they consisted in national university students) in the building of associations for irrigation amounted to a "...subsidy for the transaction costs of local collective action".[101]

A Swedish example comes from *Utbildning för Biståndsverksamhet* which has for many years worked with "volunteers" in a way that appears similar to the "catalysators" discussed above. In a number of Latin American cases these Swedish professionals provide support for popular organisation, both as regards initiatives and practical issues.[102]

- Finally, we may note that many successful projects deal with a more advanced structure possessing a range of organisational levels. In some cases many local organisations may exist and work quite well, yet lack unifying structures at the national level--such as a federation or a confederation. Therefore, the uniting of individual organisations into structures at a higher level can be an important task for an outside agent.[103] As we noted above, such more advanced structures appear important for the power of civil society, and assisting in building them would let donors aid without inferring too much with local group structures. In this way it is similar to capacity-building.

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[97] Banuri et als.; *op. cit.*, p. 13f

[98] Esman and Uphoff; *op. cit.*, p. 254f

[99] Ibid., p. 163

[100] Howes; *op. cit.*, p. 22

[101] Burns, Bryan; "Promoting Participation in Irrigation: Reflections on Experience in Southeast Asia", in *World Development*, vol. 21, n:o 11, 1993, pp. 1337-1849, p. 1839f

[102] Utbildning för Biståndsverksamhet; *Verksamhetsberättelse 960701-961231*

[103] Clark; *op. cit.*, p. 106

From these examples we can discern a number of donor practises that appear promising for the support of civil society. A common trait is that they don't try to direct this process from above (with the possible exception of the catalysators), but rather provide the means and instruments to stimulate existing interests and initiatives at the grassroots level.

Support through Swedish NGOs

Support for civil society channelled through northern NGOs appears to have special possibilities. As we noted in the beginning, the common view taken of them in the current development discourse is that they give "value for money".[104] As far as aid to organisations independent of the state is concerned, this is due to a number of reasons:

On the one hand, northern and southern NGOs are on the same level. Contacts between them may thus be more equal and fluid than the official donors' relationships to southern NGOs. Take the case of support from Swedish labour unions. In supporting their colleagues in LDCs, they stress their similarities and stress that they once faced similar problems.[105] A related argument is that northern NGOs often have more knowledge of local conditions and may have special capabilities in forging the contacts and networks crucial for success.[106]

Another argument is that northern NGOs can dedicate themselves to activities and support that official donors may find difficult to accomplish, such as capacity-building.[107] Finally, by their being smaller and more down-to-earth organisations, their degree of innovation may also be higher and their policies more flexible--both of which are important advantages in the difficult tasks under discussion.[108]

These traits make northern NGOs fundamental in support for independent organisations in the Third World. It is through them that official donor agencies can hope to reach civil society. We may imagine this as a great chain linking these agencies to northern NGOs, whose projects with southern NGOs may transform into support for civil associations. A word of caution should be added concerning the risk of confusing the means with the ends, that is the

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[104] Edwards and Hulme; *op. cit.*, p. 963

[105] See, for example, the folder by Wallin, Kerstin; *Les Origines du Mouvement Syndical en Suède,* (LO-TCOs Biståndsnämnd, Stockholm, 1994)

[106] Peck, Lars and Schill, Göran; *Direct Support to southern NGO's [sic],* (Policy study at Sida's Asia Department, 1996), p. 27

[107] Ibid., p. 28

[108] Clark; *op. cit.,* p. 59f

links with the intended beneficiaries. Still, even with this said, we should note that for the reasons listed above northern NGOs are often in a better position to work with local civil society than is an official agency.

As we saw in the discussion above, we can find interesting examples of how Swedish NGOs work in ways that appear to provide genuine support for civil society. Still, we also need to consider the criticism that have been directed at them in the last few years.

The first point regards their efficiency. Contrary to many theoretical suggestions, some scholars have noted that NGOs often lack efficiency, and numerous studies have questioned whether they really reach the sectors most in need.[109] Holmén and Jirström note that NGOs, due to the contextual problems they often face, tend to substitute the means for the end–i.e., focus only on one particular project and not on the desired wider impact.[110]

These problems can be blamed on the lack of a broader perspective, which brings us to a critique of the workings of Swedish NGOs raised by a British evaluation team. As the focus of northern NGOs is by necessity limited to a small number of projects, we may ask ourselves to what extent these projects really amount to support for civil society from a national perspective.[111] The notion of civil society posits the ideal of a pluralist multitude of organisations. So as far as projects do not aim at the general framework, single projects can only be expected to have limited effects.

The last point concerns the risk for dependency. Close links between northern NGOs and southern organisations may unintentionally promote relationships that endanger the independence and sustainability of the latter.[112] This is the next point to consider.

Issues for Consideration

The risk of donor dependency is high in support for civil society. This is of course especially troubling as the very idea of social capital relies on mutual cooperation and self-reliance. The influx of foreign funds may undermine this and lead to unfortunate results. As Esman and Uphoff note: "This brings us to a general observation: that malpractices are likely to increase as a larger proportion of [the resources of local organisations] comes from outside sources".[113]

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[109] See Holmén and Jirström; *op. cit.*, p. 21
[110] Ibid., p. 25
[111] Riddell et als.; *op. cit.*, p. 95
[112] This is of course a risk in all development aid no matter what givers and recipients are involved.
[113] Esman and Uphoff; *op. cit.*, p. 237

In the first place, dependency on an external actor may decrease the organisation's need to rely on own funds and contributions of members. Such a situation may severe the links between elites and members in the organisation and foster an oligarchy while diminishing support and interest among the members.[114] This, in turn, damages internal democracy and accountability in the organisation. Furthermore, it may steer the organisation more towards the presumed interests of the donor than to the goals of its members. Martine Dirven notes this phenomenon in Perú, where certain indigenous NGOs virtually established new clientelistic practises with local organisations.[115] Needless to say, this runs counter to the idea of a well-functioning civil society.

Finally, this may affect the sustainability of an organisation. We noted above that in countries where independent organisations received generous aid during authoritarian regimes (Chile and South Africa were our examples), many associations have vanished after the transition to democracy. This can be explained by a number of reasons, but the sudden lack of funds is one. Thus, foreign aid may hurt the sustainability of an organisation as it becomes more reliant on foreign aid than on local contributions. In the long run this creates problems.

This brings us to another question of great importance; namely the time-frames for support. Should support take a short or a long term perspective? What happens when aid is cut? The examples above show that quite a rich associational life may all but disappear if political and financial circumstances are changed. The issue of sustainability lies at the heart of this problem, and the question is how aid may be channelled in a way that will foster organisations that will survive an eventual withdrawal of funding.

Evidence in this regard is lacking. Still, some hypothesis may be put forward: One first observation is that organisations must to a certain extent come to rely on local contributions.[116] This has been showed in an article by Kurt Finsterbusch and Warren Van Vicklin III; investigating various USAID projects they found that the presence of financial contributions from the intended beneficiaries correlated strongly with the sustainability and maintenance of the projects.[117] (Likewise, Bryan Burns has noted that such contributions,

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[114] Edwards and Hulme; op. cit., p. 968f

[115] Dirven; op. cit.

[116] Edwards and Helms; op. cit., p. 969, Riddell et als; op. cit., p. 102

[117] Finsterbusch, Kurt and Van Vicklin III, Warren A.; "Beneficiary Participation in Development Projects: Empirical Tests of Popular Theories", in Economic Development and Cultural Change, vol. 37, n:o 3, April 1989, pp. 573-593, p. 577ff

even if relatively small, can foster both efficiency and membership participation.[118]) A related problem is that some organisations tend to be constructed around one single person, and if he or she leaves the organisation, it falls apart.

Above all, outside donors should always, in supporting organisations, keep in mind that the end must be self-sustainable organisations that possess strong identity and can rely on its members for survival. In this regard Finsterbusch and Van Vicklin also showed that factors such as communication between the project team and the beneficiaries, as well as the degree of local control and ownership of the facilities, also enhanced sustainability.

The last point to consider here is how we ought to view the support for civil society in a wider perspective. Numerous studies point to the fundamental need of contextualising civil society. We cannot expect an organisation, no matter how well-intentioned or well-structured, to function in every possible environment. The question we have to ask ourselves is thus: In supporting civil society, are we talking about support for organisations, or about something much broader? The majority of literature on civil society deals with different kinds of organisations, yet evidence does not entirely support the hypothesis that civil society and organisations are the same thing. Looking at Robert Putnam's paradigmatic study of civil society in Italy, famous for its systematic, empirical evidence in support of the importance of civil society, we can see that in his "civic community index" associations are but one part (and the one with the lowest factor loading), while the others indicate newspaper-reading and electoral behaviour.[119] Likewise, we quoted Renshaw above on her observations that in the Philippines over 20,000 officially registered NGOs ought to indicate a most viable civil society, but that in reality this community appears most impotent.[120] All this can lead us to the conclusion that a wide array of different organisations is not by itself enough to construct a viable civil society, i.e. it is not fully possible to equate organisations with civil society. The latter concept then appears more difficult to assess as it also deals with the customs, the mores and the different forms of social interaction, i.e. with the social and political institutions.

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[118] Burns; *op. cit.*, p. 1843

[119] Putnam; *Making Democracy...*, p. 96

[120] Renshaw; *op. cit.*

Now, as Douglass North has noted, institutions and organisations mutually influence each other.[121] Institutions shape the possibilities of any organisation, but are in the long run influenced as well. Thus, a focus on independent organisations is one way to strengthen civil society, but not the only one. (Indeed, such attempts may be doomed if they do not consider existing institutions.[122]) Indeed, even as it is more difficult, aiming aid efforts at the general conditions that civil society faces may be more rewarding than to focus on particular organisations. Rather than to give direct help in organising, this would amount to a kind of "infrastructural help" as it would provide conditions more favourable to popular, horizontal organisation and cooperation. These conditions should probably be seen as "public goods" in the sense that benefits from them can be drawn by a much greater number of organisations than direct support can ever hope to reach.

It may, thus, not be too far off to consider support for such an enabling environment as potentially more useful for civil society than direct support. Neither must it be always be an un-desirable strategy from the view-point of particular organisations. In describing the demands from Tanzanian civil society on the state, Aili Mari Tripp notes that these were not so much focused on delivery of goods, but rather; "...on getting the state to extricate itself from society and strengthening its role as a facilitator of independent activities".[123] As such support enhances the possibilities of organisation and provide initiative from below with greater possibilities, it may also limit the risks of dependency on foreign aid, and could thereby increase the sustainability of the organisations in civil society.

A number of possibilities should be considered in this respect. We may label them the institutional circumstances which shape civil society. These may be considered as informal or formal. Informal institutions are cultural habits, norms, traditions etc. These belong to a realm which only changes with greatest difficulty. On the other hand, formal institutions include laws, constitutions, administrative guidelines, state agencies, etc. It is probably more fruitful for a donor to try to influence and change these.

As we noted above, much of the difficulties of civil society in less developed countries stem from the characteristics of the state in these nations. Sometimes it is schematically

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[121] North, Douglass C.; *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 7ff

[122] See Howes, Mick; "NGOs And the Development of Local Institutions: a Ugandan Case-Study", in *Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol. 35, n:o 1:1997, pp. 17-35

described as big, soft and centralised, in the sense that it dominates society through practises not corresponding to the rule of law and by highly centralised ways of decision.[124] This has obviously had dire consequences for the possibility of a strong civil society. Under such a state, an autonomous space for organisation is lacking, the workings of the administration favours particularistic, vertical relations, and the centralisation leaves few local arenas for influence and cooperation.

Aid to administrative reform often aims to change this. If so, it may also improve the possibilities for civil society. It has repeatedly been hinted, and is a main finding in this study that: support for civil society should not limit itself to organisations but must also consider the institutions that shape the "opportunity structure" for these organisations.[125] By "opportunity structure" we refer to what Tarrow has defined as "...dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure".[126] From a development perspective such support is sometimes seen as "institution-building". An example may serve to illustrate this point:

Swedish NGO support is given to the Tanzanian labour movement.[127] Over the last few years efforts have been made to construct a more democratic alternative to the existing central; OTTU. Still, this development has been hindered by the lack of official recognition for the new alternative unions, something which has caused them problems in collecting membership fees. As Tanzania has not yet ratified ILO convention 87, it is impossible to force the state into recognising independent unions. This is one case where official pressure against the government may get it to act differently, and thus improve the circumstances for democratic organisation. On the other hand, it shows the limits of focusing on organisations only.

What state practises and/or official institutions is it then that we should look for? In this paper we have already hinted at some of these. The first one is rule of law. It appears that is it foremost under a accountable bureaucracy operating according to universalistic guidelines that

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[123] Tripp, Alia Mari; "Local Organizations, Participation and the State in Urban Tanzania", in Hydén and Bratton (eds.); *Governance and Politics in Africa*, (Boulder, Lynne Reinner, 1992), pp. 221-242, p. 238

[124] Hadenius; *op. cit.*, p. 11

[125] See Esman and Uphoff; *op. cit.*, p. 273f, where the authors claim that: "No strategy to strengthen local organization in support of rural development can avoid or bypass reform of the instruments of public administration through which the state relates to local publics".

[126] Tarrow; *op. cit.*, p. 85

[127] The following account is based on a conversation with Rigmor Mjörnell, LO/TCOs biståndsnämnd, 970523

independent organisations can expect to get justly treated in their contacts with the state.[128] Coupled to this is obviously the right to independent association, as witnessed in the Tanzanian case above.

Just as important as official recognition is the opening of spaces where organisations may come forward. Such autonomous spaces in the social and economic spheres have been lacking in many countries, and this has obviously limited the possibilities for independent organisation.[129] Nowadays, however, examples from Africa, for instance, show how structural adjustment of the state; "...set the stage for the further expansion of associational life [...] permitting the re-emergence of the outlines of civil society."..[130]

Furthermore, governments can provide arenas for the participation of independent organisations. A highly important device in this regard is efforts at decentralisation. More decentralised structures may be more responsive to local claims and can provide an arena for local organisations.[131] In both cases they fulfil an important function in opening the political opportunity structure for locally based social movements.[132] A condition is, of course, that such structures do possess real power to make decisions. Similar measures may include official commissions and advisory committees.

Finally, certain state practises may lower the internal transaction costs of an organisation. These include the establishment of functioning judiciary system for the settling of conflicts within an organisation. Certain kind of regulations concerning internal accountability and transparency may fulfil similar purposes.[133]

The reader should note that all of the measures just indicated are common in the discourse on support for administrative reform. Thus administrative reform and support to civil society go hand in hand. As we noted in the beginning, one underlying, and perhaps the one most promising, premise in the contemporary discourse on civil society is that a strong civil society

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[128] Evans, Peter; "Government Action, Social Capital and Development: Reviewing the Evidence on Synergy", in *World Development*, vol. 24 n:o 6, 1996, pp. 1119-1132, p. 1120

[129] Gyimah-Boadi; *op. cit.*, p. 125ff

[130] Chazan, Naomi; "Engaging the state: associational life in sub-Saharan Africa", in Migdal, Kohli, Shue (eds.); *op. cit.*, pp. 255-289, p. 272, additional African evidence can be found in ibid.

[131] Esman and Uphoff; *op. cit.*, p. 276f

[132] Fals Borda, Orlando; "Social Movements and Political Power in Latin America", in Escobar and Alvarez (eds.); *op. cit.*, pp. 303-316

[133] Clark, John; "The State, Popular Participation, and the Voluntary Sector", in *World Development*, vo. 23, n:o 4, 1995,, pp. 593-601, p. 598. See also; Esman and Uphoff; *op. cit.*, p. 281 Still, here a note of caution is probably justified as this may infringe on the autonomy of the organisation.

may strengthen the administrative capacities of the state. The positive influence between administrative reform and the evolution of a civil society may at times be one of synergy.

The aforementioned observations could lead to some important tools in development aid as it points to ways of joining efforts. While an official agency may assist in state reform, NGOs may use their position to divulge information to independent organisations about the duties of state officials and new administrative guidelines. Alternatively, reforms to decentralise can be coupled to aid for the creation of federations at the new administrative level. All in all, it shows that support for civil society and state reforms may go along and, accordingly, that a comprehensive strategy in these matters could prove beneficial. It also goes to show that the work conducted by NGOs should not be seen as separate from other projects.

Furthermore we should consider other institutions that shape the prospects for civil society. Some of these cannot be placed neither in the state nor in civil society. The existence of independent media which may serve as channels for claims and grievances is one example. Another structure of high importance is the party system for the reasons outlined above. Aid to the contruction of party systems able to link the political and the social spheres may thus have positive implications for civil society.

Which way forward?

The present paper is only been intended as a review of some issues concerning civil society and development. As I noted in the beginning, civil society has become a pet concept in the development discourse during the last decade. Still, systematic studies are still in great need, the one exception being Esman and Uphoff's study which I have frequently quoted. Therefore, northern NGOs should be encouraged to evaluate and assess their different projects in a way which enable us to identify systematic traits. A data-base consisting of experiences from different projects, assessed according to some central factors such as; planning, popular participation, sustainability, links with the state, relations with other organisations, performance, etc., could be of great help in providing a more complete picture of how support for civil society works.

However, we should not limit evaluations to particular projects. Some studies of the work of Swedish NGOs place their critique on the particularist way of working, i.e., that they generally

do not consider the broader impact of their projects.[134] This critique should not over-shadow the positive aspects of their work, but it points to the need to identify a clearer strategy and to have an on-going discussion between Sida and Swedish NGOs about ways of action, in order to further enhance its efficiency. It therefore appears necessary to frame support for civil society into a broader picture to enable analyse and identification of the prospects in each country. Reviewing the literature on development and civil society, we find a good deal of information about particular associations but less on their effects and the national environment which they face. The academic research community can fulfil an important role in solving this problem and the work of country and/or regional specialists could be of great help. In addition to theoretical developments, such research would, for instance, aim to provide assessment of the prospects and problems of civil society in individual countries and regions. In an earlier study commissioned by Sida, Göran Hydén has proposed one simple method of assessment, which is based on four main variables; Basis of social action; Nature of state action; Nature of political legacy; and Nature of inter-cultural relations.[135] If such assessments are present, it will certainly be easier to identify the possibilities in each nation and support may come to better use and reach where it is most needed. Hydén's proposed "Rapid Civil Society Appraisal" can be a first step in this regard, but is probably too schematic to provide exact and definite guidelines.

On the other hand, such guidelines should not be to constraining. Among the positive traits of channelling aid through northern NGOs is exactly their small scale, knowledge of local conditions, and closeness to their projects. We should not in any case let official planning and central guidelines substitute for these qualities. Rather, we have to try to join the general and the specific, and preserve closeness and small scale while keeping an eye on the big picture. This could perhaps be done by Sida's taking a greater responsibility for assessment and for providing a comprehensive picture that would enable joint and coordinated efforts by the Swedish NGOs.

The very last point to consider is how civil society should be seen in a general policy framework. From the discussions above it stands out that social capital can be a benefit in development projects. Returning to Finsterbusch and Van Vicklin's study, they found that participation through democratically structured popular organisations tended to increase the

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[134] Riddell et als; *op. cit.*, p. 130ff

effectiveness of projects both with regard to overall performance and to social development.[136] To the extent that this finding can be generalised, it could be argued that support for civil society should be systematically "main-streamed" into all aid projects, in the same way as gender equality, human rights, and democracy is today.[137] Such an approach would serve two purposes; on one hand it could enhance the efficiency of individual projects, on the other hand it may, if paying attention to organisational structure, institutional framework etc., serve as support to civil society.

Conclusions

According to the terms of reference, this paper has only been intended to provide a general theoretical picture of the relationship between civil society, development and aid efforts, as well as to extract some themes for discussion. For the latter point, I have in this paper noted some, mutually related, themes.

First, I noted that the relationship between state and civil society must be assessed with more clarity. In the light of recent research it appears fruitful to see these two entities as potentially reinforcing under certain conditions.

In relation to this, we noted that support for civil society can be conducted in many ways, but that it appears essential to not only keep a focus on individual organisations. Changing and improving the circumstances under which civil society may emerge can be more important that isolated projects. This is a point that has also been made in other studies commissioned by Sida.[138] We furthermore noted that such support could serve to limit the risks of donor dependency and un-sustainable organisations.

Lastly, we noted that if such support is to be an option we need to carefully assess the conditions in each country and region. By doing so, we may obtain a much more complete picture of how civil society can be fostered for the benefit of greater political and economic efficiency.

Above all, we must keep in mind that civil society and social capital are indigenous phenomena, something which makes support difficult. Still, if successful, such support may prove very rewarding from a development perspective.

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[135] Hydén; *op. cit.*, p. 8ff

[136] Finsterbusch and Van Vicklin; *op. cit.*

[137] This idea has also been proposed by the UNDP, see; Fowler, Alan D.; *UNDP and Organisations of Civil Society: A Programme Framework* (2nd draft), (UNDP, February 1997), p. 19

[138] Holmén and Jirström; *op. cit.*, p. 39

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