



Democratic Institutions Section

Democratic Institutions Section contributes to UNIPISIL's peace mandate building by focusing on the consolidation of democracy and good governance through the strengthening of democratic institutions as stated in the applicable Security Council Resolutions¹ and provided for by the UN Joint Mission, of 2009.

In recent months, the Section has amended its priorities² taking into consideration the coming elections in November, 2012, drawing down of UNIPISIL, and other relevant issues of the national context.

Consequently, the main areas of focus are:-

1. Media - supporting main media institutions to perform in accordance with established professional and ethical standards, including playing a role to ensure peaceful, non-violent elections. To achieve this objective, we support the following: Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation, (SLBC) Guild of Editors, Independent Media Commission (IMC), Community Radios - Independent Radio Network (IRN) and Cotton Tree News (CTN), Sierra Leone Association of Journalist(SLAJ), and Artists for Peace.
2. Democratic Governance and Extractives – engaging with key actors in the natural resources sector to ensure transparency and accountability in national resource governance. Specifically, we examine the extent to which state and non-state actors in the sector, adhere to norms and standards espoused by UN, AU and ECOWAS on natural resource management and peace building
3. Civil Society Organizations – recognizing the need to work with democratic institutions within both state and society, DI section supports CSOs in their role of eliciting accountability from state actors, donors, UN system and themselves. A CSO policy forum has been created by national CSOs, called the National CSO platform, which works on all policy issues in seven thematic areas³. The Platform holds a monthly meeting with the ERSG at which matters of national policy and work of the UN are discussed.
4. Audit of Democratic Institutions - supporting an audit of the main democratic institutions in the country created by statute since TRC report of 2004, with the view to identifying their contribution to the peace consolidation and governance, and making policy recommendations.
5. Support to National Constitutional Review Process – Supporting organizations within state and society working on constitutional review.

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¹UN Security Council Resolutions 1829, (2008), 1886 (2009), 1941(2010), 2005(2011).

²Earlier the section had given its support to the following thematic areas: Anti-Corruption, Youth Employment, Decentralization, Child Policy, National Conference, & Environment

³The seven thematic areas, also called clusters, are: Governance, Natural resources, Peace Security & Human Rights, Social Movement and Social Change, Vulnerability and Exclusion; Election and Information, Education, and Communication.

POLICY BRIEF



DIS-CS2012-001
March 2012

Civil Society Organisations' Cluster Engagement in Sierra Leone: The rationale and progress to date

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The author, Abu Badasi Sesay is the Democratic Governance Officer of UNIPSIL in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The views expressed here are those of the author and not necessarily that of UNIPSIL.

The Platform should therefore guarantee that certain tasks and roles stay at agency and cluster levels. In addition, member groups should uphold principles of inclusivity and participation, gender sensitivity and respect for cultural diversity. At all times, the Platform should proceed along democratic lines and work according to national interests.

5.0 Recommendations

- ◆ All CSOs are encouraged be part of the cluster arrangement although membership is voluntary
- ◆ The CSO Platform should be apolitical and free from any form of political interference or manipulation
- ◆ The relationship between government and civil society should be transformed with regular consultations a priority
- ◆ State actors should work with the CSO Platform on all projects requiring the active participation of civil society
- ◆ The entire donor community should engage with the Platform and avoid creating other structures
- ◆ The UN family needs to adopt a common approach to CSOs. All commitments in the *Joint Vision* policy to work with civil society should be monitored and evaluated
- ◆ The UN to sponsor donor conferences in support of the CSO Platform. Aid channelled through CSOs should be aligned to national priorities and coordinated to avoid duplication
- ◆ CSOs should help develop political space at the local level to support communication between local authorities and the population and encourage accountability and participation
- ◆ The CSO platform should set up think tanks to research and regularly publish its findings on topical issues affecting civil society
- ◆ The CSOs should better conceptualize and execute programs in a sustainable fashion.
- ◆ The CSOs need greater communication, sharing of information and collaboration
- ◆ The CSOs need to strengthen and democratize their internal decision making structures.
- ◆ There is need for dose link between local organizations and their international counterparts

This paper is the first in a series on the operations of the Civil Society Organisation Platform in Sierra Leone. Information has been collected from a number of reports, meetings/workshops and retreats over several months.

A Micro Capital Grant (MCG) agreement was signed with UNDP to implement the project promoting peaceful elections in February 2012. The CSO Platform sees the project as a stepping-stone and a test in assessing the cluster arrangement in implementing projects.

4.0 Pros and cons of the cluster arrangement

This Platform will serve as the main hub through which the UN, donors, the international community, Diaspora, state actors, non-state actors and general public work with CSOs in Sierra Leone. In this way, effective grassroots development may shift the burden of expectation currently fixed on the state. In order to ensure this initiative is sustainable, all stakeholders should support it, recognizing that the Platform represents CSOs around the country. With this initiative in place, it will be far easier to galvanise efforts at sectoral or cluster levels for the purposes of sharing experiences and best practice and managing scarce resources.

It is hoped that the current initiative will address the weaknesses outlined above, particularly in the areas of capacity and cohesion. State and non-state actors will have a clear-cut route for working with CSOs. This initiative will increase CSOs' fundraising efforts and minimize duplication of resources and tasks. It should also promote support for newer CSOs enabling them to benefit from interventions and programmes.

Working through the Platform, CSOs will have a common approach to calling for accountability of duty bearers and participation of rights holders in all aspects of the country's development. This should minimize the tension between state actors acting with CSOs on the one hand and the private sector working with CSOs on the other. In relating to government, the Platform will adopt a non-confrontational approach leading to more open and productive discussion of the issues facing all citizens.

However, there is a downside to this initiative and it is important to consider the risks. Clearly, the Platform will fail without a clear strategic direction and a constant focus on the bigger picture but too much emphasis on central co-ordination could lead to a number of undesirable factors:

- Micro-management
- Weakened links with grassroots
- Dominance of bigger CSOs
- Political affiliation and influence
- Regional divide
- Partial participation of CSOs

Elections: National Electoral Watch (NEW); **Peace, Security & Human Rights:** Fambul Tok and MARWO PNET; **Vulnerability & Exclusion:** Sierra Leone Youth Empowerment Organisation (SLYEO), Women's Forum and Defence & Children International; **Natural Resource and Economic Justice:** Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD) & National Advocacy Coalition on Extractives (NACE); **Social Movements and Social Change:** Trade Union Confederation Sierra Leone (TUC SL) & Sierra Leone Traders' Union (SLTU); **Information, Education and Communication:** Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ). The CSO Platform can be contacted through www.csoplatformsl.com

Executive Summary

This policy paper outlines the efforts made by civil society organizations (CSOs) in planning a 'cluster arrangement' for their future contributions to the development of the country. CSOs in Sierra Leone include umbrella/alliance organisations, community based organizations, social movements and sectoral organisations, ie groups who work in specific areas such as health, environment, youth etc. CSOs constitute the third sector alongside the state and private sector. They often have deep local roots and enjoy the trust of the communities in which they operate.

The challenge facing CSOs has always been how best to implement policy? In order to meet this challenge, CSOs have put in place mechanisms for effective delivery through 'professionalizing' their organisations. They have also realised that there are fledgling CSOs that need the guidance and capacity if they are to achieve the best outcome for their communities. CSOs have therefore come together to create a CSO 'Platform' and 'clusters' around key themes.

The UN and other organisations, both national and international, should be seen as helping CSOs fulfil their mandate of advocating on behalf of citizens and helping resolve issues they face on a daily basis. Although CSOs have encountered a number of hurdles, they have contributed enormously to consolidating the peace in Sierra Leone. It is hoped that these new organisational arrangements will enable them to continue such positive and valuable work.

Recommendations

Civil Society

- All CSOs should be part of the cluster arrangement although membership is voluntary
- The CSO Platform should be apolitical and free from any form of political interference or manipulation
- CSOs should help develop political space at the local level to support communication between local authorities and the population and encourage accountability and participation
- The CSO platform should set up think tanks to research and regularly publish its findings on topical issues affecting civil society

United Nations and International Community

- The UN family needs to adopt a common approach to CSOs. All commitments in the *Joint Vision* policy to work with civil society should be monitored and evaluated.
- The UN to sponsor donor conferences in support of the CSO Platform. Aid channelled through CSOs should be aligned to national priorities and coordinated to avoid duplication.
- The entire donor community should engage with the Platform and avoid creating other structures.

State actors

- The relationship between government and civil society should be transformed with regular consultations.
- State actors should work with the CSO Platform on all projects requiring the active participation of civil society.

For the purposes of accountability, the UN now regularly updates CSOs on its own work and national issues generally.

Despite these creditable moves, there remains the need for the UN, its international partners and donors to re-examine their support to CSOs and to deepen their understanding of the dynamics of civil society in Sierra Leone. With a clearer insight into the core values of CSOs, the international community would be able to offer more meaningful support. The UN family, in particular, needs to adopt a common approach in dealing with CSOs. Steps have been taken in this direction with most of the 21 programmes in the *Joint Vision* policy committing to strengthen CSOs as effective watch dogs. The UN family has also agreed to provide them with space in their regional field offices and internet access.

In addition, in the last 12 months, UNIPSIL has facilitated the coordinated mechanism or 'platform' for civil society in Sierra Leone. Almost 100 CSOs are members of this 'Platform' which consists of seven clusters:

- Governance
- Natural resource management
- Peace, security and human rights
- Social movement and social change
- Vulnerability and exclusion
- Elections
- Information, education and communication.

Echoing the aspirations of the 2006 National Social Forum, the CSO Platform is the foremost civil society grouping in Sierra Leone¹⁵. It is headed by a Steering Committee which includes the leads and co-leads of the clusters¹⁶. The Committee is headed by John Caulker, Director, *Fambul Tok*. The CSO Secretariat is housed at the *Fambul Tok* Office, 47 Robert Street, Freetown. *Fambul Tok* is the host organisation and all matters relating to the Steering Committee are channelled through them.

The Platform has institutionalised monthly cluster meetings, monthly cluster feedback sessions and quarterly coordination engagement meetings. Related to the foregoing, is the institutionalized monthly meeting between the ERSG and members of the Platform which discusses matters of policy. During the monthly meetings the various clusters share with the ERSG issues of interest and concern. In some cases the ERSG is called upon to use his good offices to intercede in a given situation. The ERSG, in turn, as head of the entire UN system, reports to the platform members key developments within the UN system and major activities embarked upon by UNIPSIL and the other agencies.

The CSO Platform has recently been awarded its first project – an election support programme – with funding from UNIPSIL/UNDP. The Project Implementing Partner (IP) is Action Aid International Sierra Leone.

¹⁵Joint Letter of Cooperation on the subject Civil Society Collaboration on Elections Processes signed by CSEEP and CSPNVE 22nd December 2011.

¹⁶Cluster Leads and Co-leads: Governance: Campaign for Good Governance (CGG);

In addition the report drew attention to some of the shortcomings amongst CSOs including:

- Poor participation in the implementation and monitoring of development projects
- Weak reporting systems
- Lack of accountability coupled with poor community relations
- Inability of communities to demand accountability;
- Fragmentation of CSOs and duplication of effort
- Little proactivity
- Marginalisation of vulnerable groups
- Negative cultural beliefs and practices
- Open to political manipulation

The report also stressed the need for CSOs to come together to speak with one voice, free from the taint of party politics.

Following this, CSOs in Sierra Leone took the initiative to adopt the 'cluster arrangement' of working in which groups of local organisations come together as a 'cluster' under a common vision and with common objectives. Benefits include:

- Joint programming
- Information sharing
- Knowledge sharing and management
- Leveraging resources
- Integrated thematic response

The hallmarks of this latest civil society initiative are sustained engagement, coordination and collaboration. The general feeling is that such co-operation is critical for national ownership of development processes, democratic governance, and the quality and relevance of programmes.

3.0 The UN System and Civil Society Organizations

In Article 71 the UN Charter accords recognition to the work of NGOs within the UN system. This relationship was re-affirmed in resolution 1296 (XLIV) of 23rd May 1968. The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) makes arrangement for consultations with NGOs. The Council adopted resolution 1986/31 after a thorough review which created varying categories and status of NGOs. The role of NGOs within the UN normative legal system had therefore been recognised as far back as 1945¹¹.

For the UN, CSOs bring valuable links to civil society and communities beyond its reach. However, in the past, the UN has been accused of being one of the main culprits responsible for fragmenting civil society by creating parallel CSOs rather than working with previously established groups. These days the UN is committed to improving its relationship with CSOs and enhancing their capacity as mandated by the Member States of the General Assembly.

¹¹ Nara K A Bisla Jr, The Zimbabwean Non-Governmental Organizations Bill 2004 and International Human Rights Law Standards: Issues, Analysis and Policy Recommendations, UNDP, Report, pp 19-20

1.0 Introduction

Civil society eludes any precise definition. It is generally accepted though that such 'societal' organisations should not represent any faction of the political elite. The early European political philosophers defined civil society in the context of its position between the state and the society. For the modern political theorist Larry Diamond civil society is "the realm of organised social life that is voluntary, self-generating, self-supported, and autonomous from the state"¹². John Keane views it as "a complex and dynamic ensemble of legally protected non-governmental institutions..."¹³

According to Schmitter, "civil society is a set or system of self-organised intermediary groups"¹⁴. Marxists such as Gramsci identify civil society with the realm outside the power of the state¹⁵. CIVICUS sees civil society as "the space between the family, state and the market, where people come together to pursue their interests". The CODESRIA school of African and Africanists' scholars prefer to use the concept of social movements, by which they refer to different associations and organizations within society that stands between the state and the family, within an interest in pursuing a group interest or an interest of general national good¹⁶.

All these definitions have four key features in common:

- Independence from the state and private capital
- Self-organisation
- Deliberation and respect for civil society
- Institutionalisation

The formation of civil society is a process that is conscious and deliberate¹⁷. The establishment and development of CSOs should be based on the need to strengthen civil society to address the concerns of the communities they serve¹⁸.

¹² Larry Diamond 1994 'Rethinking Civil Society: towards democratic consolidation' *Journal of Democracy* Vol 5 No. 3 Jul 1994 pp 4 – 17

¹³ John Keane (Ed) 1988 'Civil Society and the State' London: Verso Books

¹⁴ Philippe C. Schmitter 1993 'Some Propositions about Civil Society and the Consolidation of Democracy' *Institutional Modernity Studies: Reihe Politikwissenschaft* No. 10 September 1993 http://www.lis.ac.at/publikations/polipw_10.pdf (accessed 4th April 2012)

¹⁵ Antonio Gramsci (1994) 'Selections from Pre-Prison Writings' Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

¹⁶ CIVICUS (2006) *Civil Society Index Report for the Republic of Sierra Leone: A critical time for civil society in Sierra Leone* https://www.civikus.org/new/media/CSI_Sierraleone_Executive_Summary.pdf (accessed 4th April 2012)

¹⁷ See generally Michael Cole, Responding to The Challenge of State Capability in Africa: Toward Democratic Developmental States, Unpublished Concept Note for Sub-Saharan Africa HDR, Dakar, June 2007. In this concept note the author makes reference to a number African scholars on the subject.

¹⁸ Jean Jacques Rousseau (1752) 'The Social Contract or Principle of Political Rights' London

¹⁹ Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba (1963) 'The Civic Culture: political attitudes and democracy in the nations' Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

Economic development can also be a motivation. As a nation becomes more economically developed, changes will naturally occur. The reasons behind groups coming together become more complex¹⁰. CSOs may also be formed on the basis of independently expressed interests and goals¹¹.

A number of activities are expected of civil society:

- Communicating citizens' demands to the state leadership
- Mobilising the population on issues of concern
- Enabling citizens to exert influence over government
- Ensuring the principle of vertical accountability - rulers answering to the ruled
- Preventing democratic backsliding
- Bringing political leaders to account.

2.0 Background

The conflict in Sierra Leone spurred civil society to work hard in the pursuit of peace, leading to an increase in CSOs throughout the 1990s. CSOs are important actors in conflict situations: they can either fuel conflict or make significant and positive contributions to peacebuilding and development in a post conflict country like Sierra Leone. Despite the challenges and their own shortcomings, CSOs undoubtedly made their mark on peace consolidation in the country. Most CSOs focused on social welfare and community development, areas in which they have the potential to design and implement policy¹². Some have a specific and closely defined mandate while most have mandates that are much broader.

Nevertheless, CSOs in Sierra Leone faced tremendous hurdles that continue to hamper operations. These include insufficient capacity to advocate for the communities they represent and to mobilize members for effective and sustained collective action. There is often no effective coordinating mechanism for networking and collaborating. This means there is no concerted effort to collectively engage government. CSOs have also failed to build synergies, resulting in duplication and wastage.

The lack of resources results in the formation of what is referred to as "catch all" CSOs; meaning CSOs claiming to work in areas and sectors where it has no expertise or know how because that is the only way it can get funding from donors. The majority operate from a limited resource base and the need to attract funding has led them to tailor their primary goals and principles to suit the requirements of donors. As a result such CSOs can claim to be working on diverse themes as rights of girl child, micro credit, environment, election monitoring, etc just to catch attention of a donor with funds. In the end no niche is developed.

¹⁰Norman H Nie et al (1969) "Social Structure and Political Participation: Development Relationships" in *American Political Science Review* Vol LXIII June 1969 No.2 pp 361 - 378

¹¹Marcia Weigle and Jim Brittenkl, "Civil Society in Reforming Communist Regimes: The Logic of Emergence," *Comparative Politics*, October 1992 pp 1 - 23

¹²Joe A. D. Aile Baselle *Survey of Civil Society Organisations in Sierra Leone*

There are others too who do good work but because of their focus on communities and not a professionalized NGO, they may not fit the criteria for grants. This leaves them without the resources they desperately need for programmes, for improving structures and their organisational capacity. In those cases where funding is granted, programmes conforming to the requirements of external donors may leave untouched the needs of the 'client communities'.

Some CSOs are faced with issues ranging from absence of defined goals and objectives and at times spread too thinly; short term and reactive nature of planning; do not monitor or evaluate the effectiveness of their operations in order to integrate these lessons into the next stage of their operation and development; duplication and overlap among groups and a significant lack of coordination in their activities; competition and a desire to dominate rather than cooperate; lack of internal staff processes; one man shows- head of organization noticeably dominated; lack of money for day-to-day operations; donor-dependency- programs dictated by donor agencies; unaware of the various donor organizations; relationship between local and international organizations has been largely exploitative; and limited or no investment in training professional staff. Partisan politics often reduce the effectiveness of CSOs. There is rampant tribalism, nepotism, regionalism and an emphasis on 'who you know' rather than 'what you know'. Some CSOs at times reflect a north-south divide in their response to national issues¹³. Others have grown too close to government which has cost them their independence of opinion and autonomy.

There is a strong view among observers that CSOs have failed in their original aim as they no longer speak for the voiceless; neither do they advocate for ordinary citizens. CSOs have also been weighed down by their inability to differentiate between their role and their thematic focus. Some CSOs have become heavily centralised, built around individuals and lacking democratic principles.

All these issues have served to minimise the impact of some CSO programmes. Though CSOs are undeniably important agents of social resistance who can work outside existing social boundaries, questions remain about how truly democratic they are in practise. Doubts in this regard have eroded the credibility of some CSOs, while others are seen to lack basic capacity. Although this may not be true of CSOs everywhere, it is a widely held view that has profoundly impacted the ability of CSOs to deliver.

In 2006, civil society held a National Social Forum Bo to kick-start the process of setting up a Social Forum¹⁴. The report recommended setting up a centralised structure with six 'petals' or thematic areas:

- Good governance
- Peace, security and human rights
- Natural resources and economic justice
- Vulnerability and exclusion
- Regional reintegration
- Social movements and social change

¹³Civil Society Dialogue organized by Civil Society Peace building Engagement Coalition (CSPEC) on 15th and 16th October 2009 at Sautaro House in Howe Street, Freetown

¹⁴National Social Forum held in Bo, 10th - 13th July 2006 organized by the Civil Society Alternative Process of Sierra Leone (CSAP-SL)