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Civil society, democratisation and foreign aid in Africa

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Summary

This paper summarises the findings of a comparative research project on the contribution of civil society organisations to democratisation in Africa. Drawing primarily on empirical case studies of civil society organisations in South Africa and Uganda, and related material from Ghana, the research examines their ability to influence government policy and legislation through tangible shifts in policy and legislative priorities and their implementation, and to widen the opportunities available to citizens to participate in public affairs, promoting a culture of accountability and challenging the power of the state to dominate decision-making. The research also assesses the impact of foreign aid on the political efficacy and internal governance of civil society organisations to determine the extent to which these attributes are shaped by external support.

Despite the acknowledged importance of policy engagement, the study finds that few civil society organisations demonstrate a consistent level of direct involvement in the policy process and fewer still make a significant difference to policy outcomes. Organisations that are closely linked to political parties and the state through ideological affinities or material resources have the greatest ability to exert policy influence, although official patronage does not guarantee successful engagement in the absence of strong organisational capacity. Donor funding for civil society policy advocacy has not made a major impact, though well-organised and substantially funded NGOs have made a significant contribution in some circumstances. Foreign aid can facilitate access to the policy process and strengthen capacity where there are opportunities for engagement and strong organisations already in place but it is not the most critical determinant of successful policy engagement. Rather it is the character of a particular organisation's internal governance in galvanising the citizen's voice and its specific relationship to the state and the political realm that are the most decisive factors in achieving policy influence.

The contribution of civil society organisations to democracy is not limited to their capacity to influence public policy; they also foster voice and participation, which in turn are functions of internal governance practices. Their capacity to offer citizens a say in decisions and to enhance pluralism may be as important as their ability to influence policy and demand accountability from state actors.

Keywords: civil society; governance; public policy; democracy; Africa.

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Preface and acknowledgements

This paper is the culmination of a rich and extended process of collaborative research beginning in the late 1990s funded by the UK Department of International Development and an anonymous donor in South Africa.[*] The research stemmed from the shared perception that the increasingly influential donor discourse of strengthening civil society to deepen democracy in Africa required critical scrutiny. The cherished assumption that organised African citizens could voluntarily form independent associations to successfully challenge human rights abuses, the corrupt use of state power and autocratic rule remained largely untested. This gave rise to a joint research endeavour in which academics from research institutions in Ghana, South Africa, Uganda and the United Kingdom produced a series of surveys, reviews and case studies to investigate the policy impact of civil society organisations. The case studies were produced over a period of several years and most have been published as working papers by their respective authors and institutions. Nearly 30 working papers and publications have resulted from this exercise.

The publication of this paper was delayed by the sad and premature death in June 2003 of one of the key project collaborators, Nyangabyaki Bazaara, at the time the Executive Director of the Centre for Basic Research in Kampala, Uganda. Bazaara was due to be one of the joint authors of the paper but illness prevented him from making a contribution in print as originally intended. We would therefore like to dedicate this paper to the memory of our late friend and colleague, who contributed a great deal to the ideas and materials that informed the gestation of this project and its findings. We are grateful to Anne Marie Goetz and Joe Oloka-Onyango for insightful comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper.

Abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DENIVA	Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Organisations (Uganda)
FABCOS	Foundation for African Business and Consumer Services (South Africa)
GBA	Ghana Bar Association
HURINET	Human Rights Network (Uganda)
IDASA	Institute for Democracy in South Africa
NAWOU	National Association of Women Organisations in Uganda
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council (South Africa)
NOTU	National Organisation of Trade Unions (Uganda)
PRSPs	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
SANCO	South African National Civic Organisation
UMA	Uganda Manufacturers Association
UNSA	Uganda National Students Association
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WNC	Women's National Coalition (South Africa)

1 Introduction

Civil society is widely believed to have the potential to make a positive contribution to democratisation in Africa and other parts of the developing world. This assumption derives both from theoretical expectations of the democratic potential of organised associational activity and the actual role of civil society organisations in democratic transitions over the past decade. In the liberal conception, which dominates contemporary scholarship and policy debate, civil society provides a vehicle through which citizens can pursue common goals, participate in and influence public affairs, and practise democratic values of tolerance, consensus building and free and open debate (Diamond 1994; White 1994; Robinson 1995). Civil society organisations actively contributed to regime change and the transition from authoritarian rule in Eastern and Central Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s through public debate, campaigns, street demonstrations and other forms of mobilisation (Howell and Pearce 2001).

Influenced by these ideas and events, foreign aid donors became increasingly aware of the role and potential of civil society in democratic transitions in other parts of the developing world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. This was reflected in the changing emphasis of democracy assistance programmes from elections and political institutions to support for civil society. The shift towards support for civil society also signalled recognition on the part of aid donors that political conditionality and elections are more controversial, and that direct forms of engagement in the political process are likely to provoke opposition from recipient governments (van Rooy 1998; Carothers 1997; Carothers 1999; Burnell 2000). Aid donors favoured organisations engaged in activities designed to increase government accountability, broaden participation in public life and influence state policy as potential recipients of financial support in the form of grants and technical assistance. In particular, aid donors supported civil society organisations to engage in dialogue and advocacy with government authorities over key areas of policy and legislation, as a means of widening the parameters of public debate and rendering decision-making processes amenable to greater citizen participation and oversight, irrespective of the type of regime (Ottaway and Carothers 2000). Singled out for particular attention were non-governmental organisations (NGOs), business associations, trade unions, women's groups, religious organisations and human rights groups, for the most part formally constituted and legally registered (Hearn 1999a).[1]

Despite a considerable degree of policy interest in the role and potential of civil society organisations, the proportion of aid allocated for this purpose within recipient countries and across donor programmes is relatively modest, amounting to a very small percentage of aid flows (Hearn and Robinson 2000). Nevertheless, donor assistance has the potential to make a major impact on civil society organisations and their ability to engage effectively with state institutions when these organisations depend heavily on foreign

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[1] This approach was taken furthest by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Center on Democracy and Governance, which identified a specific category of "civic advocacy organisations" as emblematic of efforts on the part of advocacy groups to influence public policy and legislation. See Hansen (1996) for details.

aid, and grants are sizeable in relation to their income. Experience demonstrates that problems can arise from over-dependence on foreign funding, capacity constraints and skewed and unrepresentative membership, and these lessons have begun to inform donor perceptions and strategies (Howell 2000).

Two critical issues arise from high donor expectations of the potential of civil society to promote democratisation. First, there is no consensus on the role which civil society is expected to play in strengthening democracy and so the reasons why it should be supported by those seeking to build democracy are not self-evident. There is a continuing need to examine the roles which civil society organisations are meant to play and whether this does strengthen democracy if the appropriateness of donor support to civil society organisations is to be tested. Second, despite the often unquestioned assumption that civil society organisations are able to play an important role in strengthening democracy, relatively little is known about their effectiveness and impact. In particular, their contribution in public policy formulation and implementation has not been systematically assessed, despite a significant inflow of resources from foreign aid donors. The perception that civil society groups can make a positive and significant contribution to public policy continues to underpin the programming strategies of leading donors in the absence of firm evidence of success.

These considerations formed the point of departure for a research project which set out to analyse the impact of foreign aid on civil society organisations in three African countries – Ghana, South Africa and Uganda – exhibited in changes in their internal organisation and their ability to influence government policy and legislation through consultation, lobbying and direct pressure. On a wider canvas the research sought to determine the contribution that civil society is making to democratisation in the three countries by widening the opportunities available to citizens to participate in public affairs, by promoting a culture of accountability and in challenging the power of the state to dominate political affairs and decision-making. All three countries have experienced some form of authoritarian rule under civilian and military regimes, and are now ruled by regimes which have, to differing degrees, democratic features. Uganda is ruled by a "no-party" regime known as the Movement system but holds regular elections and also permits independent civil society organisations to organise. South Africa and Ghana are multi-party democracies in which civil liberties are formally recognised but, while Ghana has experienced a change of government through elections, the African National Congress (ANC) has won three successive general elections in South Africa by a wide margin. The ANC dominates the legislature and no credible challenger for power has yet emerged. While the liberal democratic features of the South African system remain firmly in place, the ANC's electoral dominance means that the parliamentary opposition is a weak source of accountability.

The research consisted of two phases of work. The first entailed investigations into the nature and characteristics of civil society organisations in the three countries, with analyses of the external and domestic policy environments based on questionnaire surveys, interviews and a review of the secondary literature. The studies of the domestic policy environment examined the state, the political regime and the prevailing

economic policy context, to ascertain how these factors shape the nature and functioning of civil society organisations. The analysis of the external policy environment focused on the role of foreign aid donors, with a particular emphasis on democracy assistance programmes and support for civil society, based on detailed interviews with leading aid donors and a review of relevant documentation.

At the core of the research were detailed case studies of 12 leading civil society organisations and their impact on public policy and legislation in South Africa and Uganda.[2] Many of these are considered by aid donors to play a leading role in the processes of democratisation, but are not representative of civil society as a whole or a broader set of development activities. All are formally constituted and some are legally registered with their respective governments. Most are "peak associations" representing networks of organisations with a common purpose and membership. All bar one case study focus on organisations in receipt of foreign aid (although the one exception is meant to receive support indirectly through a government grant). Three case study organisations in each country were selected to facilitate paired comparisons, namely trade union federations, business associations and women's organisations. The others were chosen for the insights they might reveal for particular types of organisation and their capacity to contribute to democratisation through governance work, protection of human rights and promoting citizen voice.[3]

The six South African cases are:

- The South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO), a national organisation seeking to represent township residents, which was initially formed as a federation of civic organisations operating in black townships;

- The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the country's largest national membership-based trade union federation;

- The Foundation for African Business and Consumer Services (FABCOS), a national federation of membership-based organisations representing black small businesses and consumers;

- The Women's National Coalition (WNC), a national coalition of women's organisations, including membership-based affiliates and activists of professional NGOs;

- The Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), a professional advocacy NGO which does not have a membership base but receives significant donor funding;

- Two farmers' associations in North West Province, as examples of local membership-based rural organisations that do not receive donor funding.

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[2]   In addition, the Ghanaian team produced several research papers which throw light on the questions discussed here, enabling us to discuss experience in that country too, but without detailed case studies of policy engagement.

[3]   Excluded from the case studies are informal localised organisations and ethnic associations on the grounds that they are rarely targeted for democracy assistance by foreign aid donors or engage in policy advocacy, with the exception of the two farmers' organisations in South Africa.

The six case studies from Uganda are:

- The Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Organisations (DENIVA), a national membership-based federation of Ugandan NGOs;

- The Uganda National Students Association (UNSA), a national membership-based association representing post-primary students, which does not receive direct donor funding but has relied on government funding which is wholly or partly derived from donors;

- The National Organisation of Trade Unions (NOTU), a national membership-based federation of Ugandan trade unions;

- The Uganda Manufacturers Association (UMA), a national membership-based association representing private industrial and commercial firms;

- The National Association of Women Organisations in Uganda (NAWOU), a national membership-based federation of Ugandan women's organisations;

- The Human Rights Network (HURINET), a national membership-based network of Ugandan human rights groups.

The case study research sought to examine two aspects of the role of civil society organisations in defending and broadening democracy. First, it was concerned with their *internal governance* because this reflected the degree to which they are able to give citizens a voice in public debate, a primary function of civil society organisation. Key issues here were the extent to which the organisations had a support base, consisting of formal members or citizens to whom their activities offered opportunities for voice, and the degree to which their internal organisation allowed their supporters to voice their priorities and concerns through the organisation. Second, their *political efficacy* – their ability to influence the public policy arena and thus ensure that the voice of citizens expressed through the organisation – where this occurred – would be heard by government and also in the wider society. The research also sought to determine how far foreign aid furthered or hindered the work of individual civil society organisations, by influencing their mode of operation and ability to influence public policy and legislative agendas.

Internal governance was a key object of study since this plays an important role in determining whether civil society groups can speak for their constituents. Organisations may be very successful in influencing public policy but have a limited social base, and may exhibit organisational practices that do not promote wider participation. An organisation that provides a voice for as many citizens as possible, and is effective in making that voice heard in society and ensuring that its preferences are translated into policy outcomes, is therefore considered to make a model contribution to strengthening democracy because it offers a large number of citizens an effective voice in shaping public policy and thus ensures maximum citizen participation in decisions – the prime rationale of democracy. One implication of this approach is that democracy is

furthered not only by organisations explicitly created to promote it, such as the many human rights and democracy promotion NGOs which have emerged in recent years. Strong and representative interest associations and social movements are key vehicles of democratisation.

The case study research generated in-depth profiles of the 12 organisations in South Africa and Uganda, using the criteria discussed here. The data were collected from detailed interviews and focus group discussions with leaders and members, government officials and informed observers, participant observation of formal meetings and gatherings, and a review of documentation produced by each organisation. This paper summarises the findings of the 12 case studies, with reference to other materials produced during the earlier phase of the project and from Ghana.[4] The findings are analysed through the twin lenses of political efficacy and internal governance to determine the nature and extent of civil society influence on public policy and legislation and, where influence was exerted, the degree to which it contributed to giving citizens a voice in decision-making. The paper further seeks to assess the impact of foreign aid on these outcomes, as a basis for framing generalisations concerning the contribution of civil society organisations to democratisation in Africa and the attendant policy implications for foreign aid donors.

2 Analytical framework

In its attempt to address the issues noted above, the project, from the outset, engaged with the theoretical framework developed by Hadenius and Uggla (1996) to assess the impact of civil society organisations in building and consolidating democracy. Following the tenets of liberal theory, they argue that the democratising potential of civil society organisations may be assessed along three main axes: their contribution to pluralism; their educational function; and political participation.

According to Hadenius and Uggla (1996), the contribution of civil society organisations to pluralism can be evaluated on the basis of three criteria, namely multiplicity, autonomy and organisational diversity. First, a well-developed civil society, characterised by a multiplicity of popular organisations, exercises a balancing role by providing a bulwark against authoritarianism and a defence against political oppression. Second, a high degree of autonomy from the state is required for civil society organisations to be effective in influencing the behaviour and actions of state actors, reflected in the selection and accountability of their leadership and the extent of participation in decision-making. Third, organisational diversity allows for a wide range of groups and interests to coalesce into networks and associations, and to provide a balance between contending power centres, interests and opinions.

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[4] The detailed research findings have been published as a series of working papers by the three collaborating research institutions – the Centre for Policy Studies in Johannesburg, the Centre for Basic Research in Kampala and the Centre for Democracy and Development in Accra – as listed in the references.

Hadenius and Uggla (1996) argue that the educational function of civil society inheres in the criteria of participation and accountability, which in turn strengthen democracy. Civil society organisations provide structures for inculcating democratic norms and consensus-building by developing tolerance for contrary interests and opinions and promoting respect for laws that protect minority rights, provided that they have a broad and voluntary membership and a leadership that is accountable and responsive. Second, a multi-layered organisational structure, characterised by small homogenous groups sharing similar problems and resources, promotes transparency and accountability in associational life. Organisational practices that promote accountability and mitigate hierarchy and encourage open recruitment and voluntary membership contribute positively to democracy. Finally, a broad popular base in different parts of a country where the majority of people reside strengthens the potential of civil society to contribute to democratic development (Hadenius and Uggla 1996).

A capacity to foster political participation is the third main attribute of civil society organisations in this framework. The character of an organisation's internal structures is an important determinant of its external influence, its ability to influence state decision-making and behaviour (in the form of the public policy process) and to establish productive relationships with other organisations. It follows that a participatory approach to decision-making and an open and accountable leadership are positively associated with political efficacy, namely the ability of organisations to influence state policies. The combination of smaller groupings into larger organisations (such as the peak associations and federations that constitute the focus of the case studies), and the creation of horizontal linkages and strategic alliances among similar types of organisations, can be politically efficacious in channelling claims and promoting democracy.[5]

These considerations form the basis for a core hypothesis: civil society organisations that are internally democratic and motivated by broader societal concerns (rather than narrow, self-interested behaviour) can make a positive contribution to the process of democratisation by fostering pluralism, promoting democratic values and enhancing political participation. For the purpose of this research, civil society's contribution to democracy is judged (a) on the degree to which civil society organisations are able to influence public policy and hold office holders to account, and (b) the extent to which members or supporters of these organisations have participated in exercising influence or demanding accountability through them. A further hypothesis arises in relation to external assistance: foreign aid donors can strengthen the internal governance and political efficacy of civil society organisations by providing resources and exerting influence over the domestic policy environment.

This framework raises interesting issues for empirical testing. But some of its prescriptions are difficult to fathom. Why is a high degree of autonomy necessary to influence state actors? Cannot autonomy become a constraint on influence if it excessively distances organisations from government decision-makers? Why are

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[5] For complementary approaches see Diamond (1994) and White (1994).

civil society organisations with a voluntary membership and an accountable leadership assumed to foster tolerance for others and a respect for the law? Might some organisations not mobilise some citizens against others and foster contempt for the law? Why is a 'multi-layered organisational structure, characterised by small homogenous groups' considered necessary to promote transparency and accountability in associations? Why is internal structure a determinant of influence? Surely hierarchical organisations can have as much influence as participatory democratic associations?

This paper, therefore, engages with many of the issues raised by the framework – but is concerned to examine these within an approach which sees the effective expression of voice within organisations and in society as a key determinant of the democratic contribution of civil society organisations.

3 Civil society organisations in Ghana, South Africa and Uganda

The nature and character of civil society organisations has an important bearing on their potential to contribute to democratisation, while the existence of a multiplicity of associations is often taken as evidence of healthy organisational pluralism (Hadenius and Uggla 1996). Civil society in Africa assumes a different character from that in most Western liberal democracies, reflecting underlying social and economic conditions and the particular historical and political circumstances of individual countries. Prevailing ethnic and kinship structures, the legacy of colonialism, the pattern of economic development, and authoritarian forms of political rule gave rise to civil societies that differ markedly from the voluntary associational form characteristic of the United States and Western Europe (Fatton 1992; Kasfir 1998).

In all three countries under review the emergence of formal associations representing organised collective interests first took place under colonial rule. Mass-based civil society organisations contributed to struggles for independence through their prominent role in nationalist movements, despite efforts by the colonial authorities to control and regulate their activities. These included organisations comprising peasants and workers, as well as ethnic associations representing tribal and regional interests (Bazaara 2000; Gyimah-Boadi and Oquaye 2000).

After independence in Ghana and Uganda urbanisation and economic development stimulated the formation of new organisations representing different societal interests and working on a wide variety of issues. These included large membership organisations representing farmers and workers as well as professional and business associations. However, with the emergence of one-party or military regimes there were intense efforts at co-option of independent organisations. Colonial legislation designed to control the activities of civil society was retained or modified in order to limit their autonomy, while others were co-opted into party machines or by military regimes as mass organisations representing workers, youth and women. In Ghana and Uganda successive civilian and military regimes sponsored the formation of civil society

organisations to undermine independent organisations espousing democratic values.[6] In racially exclusive South Africa, however, the accent fell less on co-option than on repression: the apartheid state suppressed independent black organisations and discouraged associational activity beyond self-help and welfare groups (Kihato and Rapoo 1999).

There was a phenomenal growth of civil society organisations in all three countries in the 1980s and 1990s, especially of NGOs engaged both in service delivery and policy advocacy. These organisations recruit professional staff and several have built up large infrastructures with significant turnovers. Several factors explain this trend. First, in Ghana and Uganda externally induced structural adjustment policies resulted in sharp reductions in public expenditure and stimulated the formation of NGOs whose primary purpose was the delivery of services to social groups adversely affected by economic reforms and downsizing of the state (Semboja and Therkildsen 1995). Second, political liberalisation in many African countries in the 1980s and 1990s encouraged the formation of a new type of civil society organisation, for the most part civil society groups and think tanks committed to promoting democracy and respect for human rights (Ndegwa 1996). A sharp and sustained increase in donor assistance to the NGO sector further stimulated this growth, which by the late 1990s had centred on the objective of strengthening civil society to advance democratisation.

In South Africa this process began in the mid-1980s, with large-scale support to groups and associations associated with the anti-apartheid movement. Many organisations were formed during the period of intensive political struggle leading up to majority rule in 1994, many of which were mass based, activist in orientation, and with strong links to the labour movement (Kihato and Rapoo 1999; Shubane 1999b). They were supported because of their role either in fighting the system or in providing for the needs of black people who were not served by the state, or both. However, the circumstances of the time – a high degree of political repression and intense hostility between organisations and the state and, at times, between organisations espousing differing political programmes – attenuated the degree to which deeply democratic associational life could emerge outside the relatively protected sphere of the workplace (Kihato 2001).

In Ghana and Uganda the steady rise of NGOs working with poor and marginalised people has been accompanied by a concomitant decline in the prominence and numerical significance of mass-based membership associations representing workers, peasants and youth, which had already been weakened by their co-option into party organisations or, as in the case of Uganda, decimated by autocratic military and civilian governments. A declining public sector labour force adversely affected trade union membership and the liberalisation of agricultural marketing has undermined the role of farmers' cooperatives. As the power and

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[6]   This was particularly marked under Milton Obote's Uganda People's Congress and Nkrumah's Convention People's Party in Ghana in the 1960s, when independent associations and trade unions were absorbed into the party apparatus (Bazaara 2000; Gyimah-Boadi, Oquaye and Drah 2000).

influence of mass-based organisations has waned, civil society has become increasingly skewed in favour of NGOs, largely on account of trends in donor funding and a growing emphasis on their involvement in the preparation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs).[7]

4 The domestic policy environment

It was noted earlier that, while internal organisational characteristics are key determinants of civil society's capacity to contribute to democratic development, extraneous factors also play an important role. The political environment and role of the state, the legal and regulatory environment and the economic policy context can shape civil society influence in important ways.

Political culture and the nature of the state shape the form and character of individual organisations and the scope for civil society to engage in public policy. Limited experience of democratic rule and a tendency towards centralisation in politics is a feature of many African countries, including those under review. Repressive state structures restrict the emergence and growth of civil society organisations and limit the type of activities they are able to engage in, while open, democratic states can actively promote associational life through material support and by creating an enabling environment in which independent groups can flourish.[8]

Strategies for controlling civil society by authoritarian regimes have ranged from repression through violence and imprisonment, co-option into state structures, through to selective accommodation. African regimes are selective in their attitude towards different types of civil society organisation. Regimes in all three countries have sought to undermine civil society organisations by forcibly incorporating them into party structures or creating rival organisations that promote the official line. Groups perceived to share goals with the regime may enjoy sole civil society access to policy-making through corporatist mechanisms because their objectives are perceived to be complementary to those of the government (Shaw and Nyang'oro 1989).

Constitutional provisions are an important determinant of the health and vitality of civil society. Basic freedoms offer some protection against excessive state intervention into the affairs of independent organisations and allow civil society groups to voice policy preferences without fear of reprisal. Authoritarian and racially exclusive regimes have used constitutional provisions to control freedom of association and expression, inhibiting the functioning of civil society groups. But with the transition to more democratic and inclusive forms of government in Ghana, South Africa and Uganda constitutions have been revised to create an environment that is considered supportive of independent citizen action.

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[7] PRSPs are beyond the scope of this paper, which focuses primarily on economic and social policy and not on poverty reduction frameworks per se. For details see, for example, McGee *et al.* (2002); Brock, McGee and Gaventa (2004).

[8] See, for example, various contributions in Harbeson, Rothchild and Chazan (1994).

Liberal constitutions, however, do not guarantee non-interference in the affairs of civil society groups by the state. For example, the Ghanaian constitution gives the government scope to impose restrictions on associational activity even if this provision is not actively deployed (Gyimah-Boadi and Oquaye 2000). Political parties remain highly regulated under the Ugandan constitution and this limits the policy options available to civil society groups (Oloka-Onyango 2000).

The legal and regulatory environment has a major bearing on the activities of civil society organisations. The state has adopted a variety of statutes governing the operation of civil society groups, even in countries with constitutional provisions that enshrine freedom of association and expression. For example, in Uganda special statutory provisions govern the activities of trade unions, cooperatives and organisations representing lawyers and journalists, some of which have their origins in the colonial period (Barya 2000). All three countries have registration procedures for civil society organisations, although these differ in the sanctions imposed for failing to register, which can range from exclusion from the policy process or bars on foreign funding to exclusion from tax advantages. Registration may be a formality or may be used to deny recognition to organisations deemed overly critical of the government. While administrative deficiencies weaken official oversight, the cost of registration can be prohibitive for organisations representing the poor, which denies them opportunities to secure access to foreign funding and tax benefits.

Economic conditions are an influential factor in the development of civil society, shaping the ability of independent organisations to attract financial support. A weak private sector, which offers a potential source of indigenous philanthropy, exacerbates dependence on funds from government and overseas sources, and in turn undermines the accountability and credibility of civil society organisations. While economic recession acts as a disincentive to domestic resource mobilisation, it can also galvanise collective action in the form of self-help efforts and provide a source of employment through NGOs that seek to fill gaps created through cutbacks in state service provision (Semboja and Therkildsen 1995).

Downsizing the state has resulted in substantial public sector retrenchment in Uganda, drastically reducing the membership of public sector unions. The balance of power in civil society has also changed as a result. Groups with a mass membership, such as trade unions, have lost influence while NGO intermediaries and business associations have grown in numbers and influence. Conversely, economic recovery in Ghana and Uganda has strengthened the material base of some elements in civil society, notably the private sector, providing organisational resources and increases in subscriptions as business associations attract new members. Moreover, the removal of restrictions on foreign exchange transactions in Ghana and Uganda has eased access to foreign funding.

The next section examines the evidence gathered by research on the impact of civil society organisations on public policy and legislation, and in broadening public accountability and political participation. As noted above, this, in our view, is the test of their contribution to democratisation.

5 Civil society and policy impact: assessing the evidence

The ostensible purpose of donor aid to civil society in Africa is to broaden citizen engagement in public affairs by strengthening the involvement of civil society organisations in policy formulation and implementation. This is consistent with the widely held assumption that civil society organisations have the capacity and potential to participate in the public policy process through structured dialogue and consultation, and advocacy and mobilisation, as a means of deepening democracy and improving governance (Hansen 1996). In the process donors hope to improve the accountability of public officials and to broaden participation in the policy process. However, in spite of the pervasiveness of these assumptions in donor circles, their validity has not been subject to detailed scrutiny in the African context.

The research findings point to considerable variation in the form of policy engagement across the three countries and among different categories of organisation, depending on the domestic policy environment, their internal organisational capacity and the availability of resources. Policy engagement ranged from efforts to influence legislation through lobbying through to more structured consultation over economic and social policy priorities. A key finding is that while most civil society organisations acknowledge the importance of engaging in public policy, few demonstrate a consistent level of direct involvement in the policy process and fewer still have a significant impact on policy outcomes. These insights can be supported and elaborated with reference to the 12 in-depth case studies from South Africa and Uganda, supplemented by additional insights from the Ghanaian experience.

5.1 South Africa

In South Africa the state provides formal channels for public participation in policy formulation, in both national and provincial government. At various stages of the legislative process there was, during the first post-apartheid administration, extensive public consultation on proposed bills through formal and informal processes in which civil society groups played a significant role. Two-thirds of the organisations surveyed said they were involved in the preparation of green and white papers by the government (Kihato and Rapoo 1999). Conventional wisdom suggests that this trend is no longer pronounced since the second post-apartheid administration, which took office in 1999, declared that a period of policy formulation was being replaced by one of implementation and that excessive negotiation on policy would delay delivery of the fruits of democracy to citizens. However, while there is clearly a decline in structured engagement – and government unwillingness to allow civil society groups a say in HIV/AIDS policy has prompted conflict between it and civil society groups who address this issue – civil society organisations retain the right to seek to influence legislation through mandatory hearings convened by parliamentary committees, and civil society participation in policy processes does seem higher than initial government statements might suggest. Also, formal consultative bodies offer opportunities for structured dialogue between representatives from government, business, unions and NGOs on critical areas of public policy. Other approaches include lobbying, publications

and informal discussions with government officials. Public protest is also at times used to pursue civil society goals. One analysis notes that, since the methods, language and style of organisation used in the anti-apartheid era continue to prevail, many groups resort to confrontation if structured policy dialogue fails to advance their cause (Shubane 1999b). On occasions, civil society organisations make use of their constitutional right to stage marches or pickets and, in one celebrated case during 2003, an organisation campaigning for medication for people living with HIV/AIDS resorted to civil disobedience.

The majority of organisations surveyed in South Africa report that their perceived impact on public policy was good or fair; few thought their impact was poor or non-existent.[9] Perceptions of effectiveness are especially high among advocacy groups and organisations in receipt of foreign funding. The survey data indicate that organisations in possession of skilled personnel, financial security and administrative capacity are more likely to be effective in influencing policy decisions, whereas those with funding problems have a low perceived impact on public policy (Kihato and Rapoo 1999). Several organisations benefit from their alliance with the ANC-led government, which provides them with privileged access to policy-makers and opportunities to exert influence. The six South African case studies lend support for these general findings, but with some important caveats and qualifications.

COSATU, the leading South African trade union federation with 1.8 million paid-up members, has achieved significant policy impact on behalf of its members. It is engaged in an alliance with the governing ANC but, particularly since 1999, has often differed from the governing party on policy issues. It participates in the public policy process through a variety of formal mechanisms such as the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC),[10] a parliamentary office to monitor legislation and to facilitate consultations with parliamentary committees and engagement with departments and ministries. It is regularly consulted on new legislation, often in advance of other civil society organisations, and provides inputs into government policy documents (Mackay and Mathoho 2001). Immediately before the 1994 election, COSATU played the leading role in the formulation of the Reconstruction and Development Programme, an ambitious economic recovery programme with strong redistributive components which was adopted by the ANC. It has encouraged the introduction of – and in some cases, directly negotiated the details of – favourable labour legislation and has successfully defended subsequent attempts to dismantle these gains.[11] Although it was much less successful in influencing – and was not consulted in the drafting of – the content of the government's subsequent macro-economic growth, employment and redistribution strategy COSATU managed to slow down plans for the privatisation of state industries.

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[9] See the survey data in Kihato and Rapoo (1999).
[10] NEDLAC is primarily a tripartite forum in which government, business and the trade unions bargain over economic policy. It also has a development chamber in which a "community" constituency finds representation.
[11] The Labour Relations Act of 1995, the Basic Conditions of Employment Act of 1997 and the Employment Equity Act of 1998 were heavily influenced by COSATU's lobbying and participation in formal consultative bodies (Mackay and Mathoho 2001: 36).

Several factors explain COSATU's relative success in policy engagement with the government. It has a strong internal democratic culture, with regular leadership elections and high levels of participation in internal union affairs. Policy priorities are established and reviewed in national congresses held every three years, and these decisions are implemented and supplemented by elected bodies which meet at more regular intervals (Mackay and Mathoho 2001: 10–14). A large membership base enables COSATU to raise the bulk of its income from fees – indeed, its members have enjoyed considerable surplus funds which prompted unions, during the 1990s, to establish investment companies. This gives it a high level of autonomy and financial independence. It does not rely on income from government sources and only to a very limited degree from aid donors, mainly in the form of grant support for research, training and policy development projects rather than core administrative expenses. This is in sharp contrast to the late 1980s, shortly after its formation in 1985, when

> donor funding played a crucial role in establishing COSATU during its formative years, and formed the bulk of the organisation's funding at that time. This provided COSATU with the means and space to grow into a self-sufficient organisation. Without it the federation would not have been able to build the capacity to organise internally and interact with the state and society externally that was necessary for it to grow and expand.
>
> (Mackay and Mathoho 2001: 3)

As a leading member of the alliance with the ANC and the South African Communist Party, COSATU retains a high degree of legitimacy with the government and provides it with channels of access to elected politicians and officials. Many senior COSATU officials were elected to parliament after the transition to majority rule as part of the ANC government (although COSATU leaders later came to conclude that this was not an effective source of influence since the elected unionists were bound by ANC policy and did not assertively pursue worker interests). As noted by Friedman and Reitzes (2001): 'Its closeness to the ANC has had a positive impact, since it enables the union federation to influence labour market policy, providing an additional voice to citizens who are also workers, and by representing and advancing their interests'.

Its perceived legitimacy in the eyes of the government is, however, more ambiguous than its status as formal ally might suggest. Relations between COSATU and the ANC are often conflictual, even as they remain allies, because COSATU's strong structural base in workplaces has given it the independence to criticise the government publicly where policies are perceived to be contrary to members' interests – or, indeed, those of the society. COSATU is often a more effective opponent of government policy than the parliamentary opposition. However, its advantages do not always translate into effective policy influence. COSATU officials complain that the government is relatively impervious to their submissions on economic

policy issues and that their influence has waned in the post-apartheid era.[12] Because South African society's racial dynamics make the white-led parliamentary opposition a highly implausible alternative government, COSATU is often cast in the role of unofficial opposition despite its alliance with the ANC, opposing the government not only on economic policy but on major social policy issues, such as response to HIV/AIDS, or foreign policy concerns, such as how to react to events in Zimbabwe.

Its capacity to engage successfully in public policy remains constrained by a lack of technical capacity rather than by financial difficulties or lack of access, in marked contrast to other civil society organisations. At the same time its critics argue that COSATU involvement in structured consultation on economic policy matters through NEDLAC and policy dialogue has reduced its role as a vehicle for worker voice because technocrats have assumed a more significant role in negotiations with government to the detriment of grassroots mobilisation and a more independent stance (Mackay and Mathoho 2001: 23-6).

IDASA, a professional advocacy organisation without a membership base, also scores well on policy visibility and impact. Unlike COSATU, it is a public interest organisation that is not membership-based. While it is not itself a conduit for citizen voice, its role as a promoter of democracy is meant to build circumstances in which voice can be better heard and can influence decisions. IDASA relies on donor funding for about 90 per cent of its income, with the balance raised from government and business and fees for services. Rooted in the anti-apartheid era when it sought to provide bridges between extra-parliamentary resistance and white power-holders in an attempt to stimulate a negotiated end to minority rule, IDASA's approach has changed to focus on strengthening democratic institutions through parliamentary monitoring and capacity building for government officials and civil society organisations, especially at the local level. It periodically engages directly in advocacy and lobbying and issues publications that are critical of government policy. At times this approach brings it into direct conflict with government, which creates reluctance on the part of officials to cooperate, though it maintains close relations with selected government departments and parliamentary portfolio committees and some provincial legislatures. Its activities span budget analysis, the provision of polling data during elections and monitoring of the national parliament, all of which contribute to strengthening democracy by increasing accountability and transparency in public affairs. IDASA's experience suggests that the lack of a membership base or durable linkages with party or government officials do not prevent an organisation from achieving sustained policy impact provided that it has a high degree of organisational capacity and credibility (Kabemba and Friedman 2001).

In sharp contrast to COSATU and IDASA, SANCO, FABCOS and the WNC have limited impact on government policy despite linkages to the ANC government, which indicates that legitimacy in the eyes of government is not a substitute for sustained strategic engagement, a solid support base and technical capacity.

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[12] An example, cited by critics, of COSATU's reduced influence is the public sector pay negotiation in 1999 when the government imposed a salary increase after failing to reach an agreement with the unions (Mackay and Mathoho 2001: 21).

Despite its claim to speak for some 4,000 local branches, SANCO has had very little influence on public policy, even in areas where it can claim some expertise such as housing and local government. While local branches have actively engaged in housing issues SANCO has not managed to exert any independent influence on the government's ambitious housing delivery programme (Heller and Ntlokonkulu 2001: 35). Nor has SANCO been able to mobilise members at the national level to influence public policy.

In the 1990s SANCO placed greater emphasis on nurturing ties with the ANC to provide the organisation with leverage and access to government officials. Many SANCO leaders were absorbed into the ANC and government structures thereby creating a leadership vacuum and eroding independence at higher levels. Incorporation into the ANC's leadership structure compromised SANCO's ability to propose alternatives to government policy and to use its influence to take up local housing and service provision grievances. As noted by Friedman and Reitzes (2001: 14), 'These dynamics obviously compromise the autonomy of the organisation, and its ability to impact on the ANC government's policy.'

While SANCO's ability to engage in and influence government policy has been of marginal significance, affiliated civics have had a significant impact at the local branch level by mobilising voice. Several of the more active branches have been engaging with local authorities by forcing municipal officials to account to citizens, through exposure of corruption and fraud and dealing with problems of housing, service provision and taxation. For example, local SANCO officials take up residents' complaints about excessive water and electricity bills, securing title deeds for squatters, registering indigents for service subsidies, filing complaints with the police, and problems of repayments on housing loans, all of which confer significant popular support. On this basis Heller and Ntlokonkulu (2001) argue that SANCO's contribution to democracy is more readily apparent in successfully politicising and mobilising citizens in local townships rather than in influencing government policy at the national level. This implies that its lack of efficacy is a result of a failure to translate grassroots activity into a national organised presence in the policy debate.

The WNC, a federation of South African women's organisations, and FABCOS, an association of black business groups, were also found to have a marginal role in public policy, despite their perceived legitimacy with and support for the ANC-led government. The WNC claims success in ensuring that women were included in the negotiations on the transition from white minority rule and in developing a women's charter, which found expression in the constitution agreed at the talks, and a higher level of representation in the post-1994 government. However, mobilisation of grassroots women's organisations through the campaign on the women's charter was not sustained once the ANC came to power. Many of the women who had played key leadership roles entered parliament or assumed government positions, resulting in a leadership vacuum. The coalition's affiliates and provincial offices wanted to take up issues such as housing, employment and violence against women, and move the organisation beyond political representation in parliament, while the ANC's

women's league wanted to close down the WNC. Despite grassroots demands for greater focus on basic needs, the WNC's work after 1994 focused on advocacy and lobbying, popularising the women's charter and advancing women's interests in government and the national parliament (Gershater 2001).

However, its tenuous support base, the absence of a strong strategic focus, its unwillingness to challenge the government and lack of funds have blunted the ability of the WNC to play an effective independent role, and it has consequently had little impact in shaping policy and legislation on gender issues in the post-apartheid era. Nor has it managed to lobby the government over issues of greatest concern to poor black African women centred on services and employment (Gershater 2001). These limitations are attributed by Friedman and Reitzes (2001) to its inability to find new interests and issues around which women can be successfully mobilised across class and racial divides and its failure to find a critical voice in the new political context (see also Goetz and Hassim 2003).

FABCOS is an alliance of black consumer and business groups which aims to contribute to black economic empowerment through affirmative action policies. Its goals are to provide services for its members and to influence government policy. Service functions include advice on tender submissions, project management, company registration and investments, as well as offering education and training in communities where its members conduct business. Despite its uncritical support for the government and its participation in NEDLAC, it has had little impact on government policy. Although FABCOS claims to have successfully promoted black economic empowerment, the evidence suggests that its contribution has been modest and that its lobbying role is secondary to service provision. FABCOS favours an approach which can be typified as quiet lobbying through selective engagement with officials in national and provincial government responsible for trade, investment and small and medium-sized enterprise development, rather than visible efforts to influence public policies which broaden citizen participation. Friedman and Reitzes (2001: 18) argue that FABCOS 'lacks representative value for its membership, and fails to provide black entrepreneurs and consumers with a decisive voice'. Its leadership claims to have influenced laws and policies in favour of its members and that the government takes its advice seriously, though evidence to support these claims is limited – as is evidence of a vigorous membership voice in the organisation. For the most part FABCOS has not been able to promote the interests of its members with sufficient vigour or champion the cause of black economic empowerment with any degree of success. In the words of Hlophe, Mathoho and Reitzes (2001: 25), FABCOS 'appears to be more of a vehicle for a collective of individuals advancing their own business interests than … for coherent collective representation on state policy and legislation'.

A rather different scenario is presented by the study of two farmers' organisations in North West Province. They focus their energy on accessing productive resources for agricultural purposes, such as land, farm machinery and extension services. But their success in achieving this is hampered by lack of organisational capacity, for differing reasons. The Balemirui Farmers' Organisation has not managed to access and distribute resources on an equitable basis to its members because it is embedded in top-down traditional

authority structures with no internal democracy, precluding it from acting as a vehicle for its members to express their preferences. By contrast, the Moretele Farmers' Association is founded on the principle of organising farmers to demand their rights. But despite initial success in securing access to state land for its members, it has proved unable to counter the cutbacks in farm input subsidies in conditions of economic austerity.

The six South African cases demonstrate that some organisations – notably COSATU and IDASA – have considerable success in influencing public policy and legislation, but that others fail to have much impact despite their links with the ANC government. An alliance with government can facilitate access and provide legitimacy for some organisations; for others it can inhibit their autonomy and efficacy. COSATU's influence stems not only from its alliance with the ANC, but from its ability to speak for a large, organised membership; with the possible exception of SANCO at the local level, none of the organisations which fail to influence policy are able to mobilise a substantial constituency in their support. Its internal governance also enables it to provide union members with a voice – here, some SANCO branches and the Moretele Farmers' Association may be able to make a similar claim but the other organisations do not offer this either. Where organisations do have an active membership to which they could give a voice in public policy debates but are unable to do so, low organisational capacity, reflected in lack of internal accountability, limited technical skills and uncertain funding appear to be significant explanations. IDASA's experience shows that organised membership is not the only route to influence. While this analysis does not relegate organised participation merely to a means to political efficacy, the ability to speak for many citizens is an important key to influence, particularly when organisations are relying not on specialist expertise, but on their claim to an important constituency.

The source of funding, whether internally generated or derived from external sources, does not seem to be a significant factor in explaining differential policy impact in South Africa. COSATU and IDASA have achieved successful policy impact even though the former derives its financial support largely from membership dues, and the latter from foreign donors and fees for services. Perhaps more significant is the stability and predictability of resources, since those organisations with minimal policy impact also have uncertain and unpredictable incomes. South Africa is also somewhat exceptional in that domestically generated income from private sources and the government is far more significant for civil society organisations than in Uganda and Ghana where dependence on foreign aid is much higher (Swilling and Russell 2002).

5.2 Uganda

In Uganda the public policy process is far less institutionalised than in South Africa, in part because parliamentary democracy and the practice of public consultation have yet to take firm root: policy engagement mainly consists of contacting government officials on a sporadic and selective basis. All six case study organisations in Uganda claim some level of engagement in public policy issues, but few have registered

demonstrable success in influencing outcomes. There is also a marked contrast between business associations which have managed to influence taxation, budget decisions and wage legislation and mass-based organisations representing students and labour which have no influence over policy and legislation.

The Uganda Manufacturers Association has the most effective policy impact of all Ugandan civil society organisations surveyed for this study. It has a specialised department responsible for lobbying, advocacy and networking and employs four key approaches in its efforts to influence government policy: advocacy to change unfavourable policies or support those which it favours; consultations over government proposals, especially in relation to tax and the budget; participation in decision-making bodies with government such as the National Forum from 1992–7; and representation in government bodies where the UMA has a strategic interest, such as the Uganda Revenue Authority. It has regular access to government officials and makes submissions on draft legislation (for example labour law) and budget proposals, largely because it espouses a reform agenda which is acceptable to government and has the skills and technical expertise to develop well-researched policy options. It has successfully recommended changes or reductions in personal taxes, excise tariffs and import duties, the administration of value added tax and the creation of a Tax Tribunal. A high degree of financial security derived from membership subscriptions and income earning ventures further strengthens its successful involvement in policy dialogue (Barya 2000).

Organisations such as NOTU and UNSA have not managed to exert much influence on public policy, partly on account of financial and administrative problems. NOTU, the Ugandan trade union federation, has sought to influence government policy and legislation through tripartite organs established by the government,[13] union representatives in the national parliament and lobbying officials, but generally has not resorted to strike action or extra-legal methods. NOTU has had no visible impact on government policy and plays only a marginal role in legislation affecting workers by virtue of limited research and technical skills, financial constraints and restricted access to information. While it has a substantial membership among workers in formal workplaces, the fact that formal workers are a small fraction of the Ugandan population may also limit its influence. Legislation governing privatisation and retrenchment of public sector workers did not take union interests into account while NOTU has not won its demand for minimum wage legislation. The only piece of labour law whose repeal and replacement unions won in the 1990s addressed the unionisation of civil servants and bank employees, but this was achieved more through worker representatives in the national assembly than concerted pressure by NOTU and its affiliates (Barya 2001).

UNSA, the national student body, mainly focuses on issues of concern to students in secondary and tertiary institutions, such as representation on school management boards or university councils, corruption and student welfare. But it depends on the government for resources or for the collection of subscription fees through schools and colleges. UNSA adopted an increasingly critical position on structural adjustment and

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[13]   Tripartite organs comprising representatives of government, NOTU and business include the Labour Advisory Board and the Labour Laws Review Committee.

cost-sharing measures in higher education but failed to mobilise students to counter the abolition by the government of student allowances in the 1990s. Demonstrations by students have occasionally secured concessions or countered official decisions, but their influence over higher education policy has generally been negligible (Bazaara 2003).

Human rights groups and women's organisations have usually avoided a confrontational approach, preferring to air their concerns through seminars and workshops. HURINET, the Ugandan human rights network, claims to be involved in advocacy and lobbying, citing its work on legislation on the prevention of terrorism and its campaign against the death penalty as examples, but its impact on human rights policy and law has been limited. Its principal method of engagement with the state has been non-confrontational dialogue, and it concentrates on offering services to its members and seminars and workshops on issues such as civic education and the provision of legal aid. HURINET strives to maintain an independent position and a cordial relationship with the government which has insulated it from repression or negative retaliation but accordingly it rarely takes a stance on controversial issues. As a result, it has not managed to address human rights violations with any significant degree of success (Oloka-Onyango 2003).

Similarly, NAWOU, the Ugandan women's network, has a department responsible for lobbying, advocacy and networking based on an explicit mandate to act as a pressure group representing women's interests. Like its South African counterpart, NAWOU successfully campaigned for women to be effectively represented in the Constituent Assembly and to take part in debates on the new constitution as a means of ensuring that the final document would be gender sensitive. It has, with some success, lobbied MPs and officials over legislation affecting women, such as the Domestic Relations Bill, and for a provision governing co-ownership of land by men and women in the Land Act, but with limited success (Goetz and Hassim 2003). Despite its lack of sustained policy influence, NAWOU has a fairly extensive reach and influence through its work with women's groups, which operate at a fairly localised level and have become more transparent and inclusive in their operations (Oloka-Onyango 2003).[14]

Non-governmental organisations are widely thought to play a key role in influencing policy and legislation and have been at the forefront of donor efforts to strengthen civil society's role in advocacy and lobbying for change (Lister and Nyamugasira 2003). However, the experience of Uganda questions the validity of this assumption. Only five members of DENIVA, a network of several hundred indigenous voluntary organisations, claim to be involved in advocacy and lobbying – this indicates the low priority accorded these activities by NGOs in Uganda, which mainly focus on poverty reduction and service provision. DENIVA organises workshops to train NGOs on advocacy and lobbying techniques, but engages in limited advocacy itself out of fear of being de-registered by the government. According to Bazaara (2003), NGOs express

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[14]   NAWOU worked with sympathetic legislators to secure the inclusion of a provision stipulating the equal rights of spouses to ownership of the matrimonial home in the draft legislation but the clause was subsequently dropped in the Act (see Oloka-Onyango 2003).

interest in lobbying and advocacy, not because they are deeply committed but because aid donors favour this approach.[15] DENIVA claims to represent the needs and concerns of the NGO sector to the government and meets officials regularly but has not registered any notable success in influencing legislation or policy affecting its members.

5.3 Ghana

Research in Ghana reveals a similar picture to that in Uganda, where active policy engagement by civil society organisations is limited in extent and impact. Civil society groups in Ghana have a long history of critical engagement with the state – the form depends on their relationship with the regime in power, which ranges from co-option to contestation. Along with the churches (the Christian Council of Ghana and the Catholic Bishops' Conference) and the National Union of Ghana Students, the Ghana Bar Association (GBA) was strongly opposed to military and autocratic civilian rule and resorted to public protest such as declarations, strikes, demonstrations and the airing of reform proposals in the media to exert influence. But a declining membership, the decision of several lawyers to serve on extra-legal tribunals established by the Rawlings regime and growing economic hardship weakened its influence and membership. The Trades Union Congress has supported some regimes but challenged others, and faced repression and attempts to co-opt its leaders by the state (Gyimah-Boadi *et al.* 2000).

The advent of democratic government in the early 1990s created new opportunities for direct policy influence using mechanisms established by law or government action. But while some organisations, notably those representing lawyers and business, present views before parliamentary committees, submit memoranda on draft legislation and lobby MPs to propose legislative amendments, this is by no means the norm. Overall, the policy impact of Ghanaian civil society organisations is limited. Trade unions and student groups have little direct influence on public policy and have resorted almost exclusively to strikes and demonstrations to express their views. Some of these actions have met with success, such as demonstrations against the planned introduction of value added tax and a bill to regulate NGO affairs in the late 1990s, but these were largely *ad hoc* and their momentum was not sustained (Gyimah-Boadi *et al.* 2000).

While in Uganda the no-party system constrains active engagement by civil society organisations since the state is less responsive and permeable to outside influence, it is not only the political environment which shapes the potential role and influence of civil society: the transition to multi-party democracy in Ghana has not widened the scope for engagement by civil society actors. The determinants of political efficacy inhere not only in the domestic environment but also in the nature and character of civil society organisations. This, as argued above, determines both whether citizens are able to express voice in membership-based organisations

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[15]   Lister and Nyamugasira (2003) claim that civil society engagement in policy processes has been increasing, usually by means of selective invitation to consultation meetings, rather than through campaigning and advocacy, which are found to be the prerogative of international rather than local NGOs.

and whether organisations are able to turn direct or indirect citizen voice into policy. Both functions can contribute to building democracy by enhancing participation and so ensuring more accountable and responsive government.

6 Organisational capacity, internal governance and democratisation

The framework developed by Hadenius and Uggla (1996) suggests that civil society's ability to contribute to pluralism and democracy is a function of three criteria: multiplicity, diversity and autonomy. They especially emphasise three sets of organisational attributes in shaping outcomes: autonomy, participation and accountability. Civil society organisations provide structures for inculcating democratic norms and consensus-building if they have a broad and voluntary membership and a leadership that is accountable and responsive. Organisational practices that promote accountability, mitigate hierarchy and encourage open recruitment and voluntary membership contribute to democracy. In this section we subject this contention to empirical scrutiny, drawing on the evidence from the surveys and case studies in South Africa, Uganda and Ghana to determine the salience of these dimensions of organisational capacity and internal governance practices for citizen participation and democratic strengthening.

6.1 Multiplicity

It is often argued that organisational diversity, characterised by a balance between different power centres, interests and opinions, is key to a healthy and politically effective civil society (Diamond 1994; White 1994; Hadenius and Uggla 1996). This view is compatible with our approach because a concern for citizen voice implies that the full range of values and interests in society should be heard.

But while our case studies show considerable diversity in activities, most civil society groups surveyed in Ghana, South Africa and Uganda do not express the views of social constituencies. Most are NGOs engaged in welfare provision and service delivery rather than membership-based organisations with a strong grassroots constituency. Of these, groups engaged in governance work, protection of human rights and democracy-promotion represent only a very small proportion in the three countries, even though they are often seemingly singled out for support from foreign aid donors. In South Africa less than 10 per cent of the 229 civil society groups surveyed were found to be engaged in activities designed to strengthen political participation, promote a democratic culture and uphold the rule of law. Health, education, social welfare and economic development are the primary spheres of activity for most civil society groups in the three countries, mainly through NGOs (Kihato and Rapoo 1999). This is not necessarily a bar to a role in expressing citizen preferences: these organisations could articulate the demands of constituencies in their chosen field. But most do not – in Uganda, for example, the majority of DENIVA members are engaged in income generation and agriculture and only a very small number list advocacy and lobbying as activities (Bazaara 2003).

Civil society organisations are also heavily concentrated in capital cities or towns, where most have their head offices, raising questions about the extent to which people that live outside these areas enjoy a voice in decisions. In South Africa there is a much higher concentration of organisations in economically affluent or politically significant provinces, with a large proportion in Gauteng, the Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. This reflects higher levels of education and economic activity, both of which are conducive to the growth and sustenance of civil society organisations (Kihato and Rapoo 1999). While increased urbanisation has reduced the political salience of the countryside, rural people remain a significant part of the population. In Ghana and Uganda, too, civil society groups are minimally represented in rural areas where the majority reside, with the result that peasant farmers and rural workers who constitute the bulk of the rural poor are not well represented. Civil society organisations in rural areas are often informal self-help groups or peasant organisations, which, in the view of one important analysis, are usually founded on hierarchical patron–client relationships and locked into chieftaincy structures (Mamdani 1996). Civil society organisations are poorly represented where they are most needed, in rural areas with large concentrations of poverty and pervasive social and political exclusion.

It is also important to note that civil society organisations in Africa tend to mirror wider social cleavages, especially class, ethnicity and gender (Kasfir 1998; Hutchful 1995/6). In all three of our countries, the middle class plays a significant role in the civil society organisations that are most visible in the public arena. Most prominent civil society organisations working on human rights and governance issues in the three countries are urban-based with a male-dominated leadership drawn mainly from the educated English-speaking middle class elites (Hearn 1999a). There is, however, an important difference between Ghana and Uganda on the one hand, and South Africa on the other. In Ghana and Uganda, professional NGOs whose ostensible mission is to promote democracy and governance by engaging with the state over public policy predominate and, as noted above, more established organisations with a mass membership base, such as trade unions and cooperatives, or ethnic associations are far less visible and have much less influence (Gyimah-Boadi *et al.* 2000). In South Africa, a far larger and more diversified domestic industrial base has ensured a much larger union movement representing the organised working class: COSATU's significant albeit limited influence is a consequence and it ensures that the policy debate is not monopolised by the middle and business classes. But even in this context, civil society organisations which represent citizens with access to organisational resources – such as trade union members – predominate, ensuring that even a vigorous civil society remains largely closed to many who lack these resources. Men invariably dominate the leadership of civil society

organisations, even mass-based organisations with a large female membership.[16] More generally, civil society participation remains limited among the millions outside the formal workplaces and urban townships where opportunities to express voice are concentrated (Centre for Policy Studies 2002).

It is, therefore, difficult to substantiate the claim that a well-developed civil society contributes to pluralism and provides a bulwark against authoritarianism simply by virtue of the existence of a multiplicity of civil society organisations. Much depends on the degree to which organisations seek to express citizens' interests and values, the extent to which participation is available to the widest possible range of citizens, including those whose interests and values may prompt them to oppose the mainstream view, and the degree to which organisations are able to influence policy. In all three countries only a small minority of groups are actively engaged in advocacy and lobbying for policy change on behalf of constituencies. Fewer still have any significant impact on public policy. A multiplicity of organisations provides space for activity independent of the state, but capacity to contribute to democracy is more a function of structures of internal governance, the distribution of participation and accountability, and political efficacy.

6.2 Autonomy

Autonomy from the state is often considered an intrinsic and desirable feature of civil society organisations. The case study evidence indicates that the relationship with the state is complex and at times contradictory, depending as much on historical and political context as on organisational attributes. The 12 organisations vary considerably in their autonomy from state actors and the consequent implications for effective representation of citizens.

Experience demonstrates that the state often seeks to inhibit the scope for effective independent action through political interference, co-option and restrictive legislation. This varies between the three countries. In both South Africa and Uganda legislation and statutory codes govern the activities of civil society groups and delimit the range of activities in which they are engaged. In South Africa, however, government registration of civil society organisations is a voluntary process – organisations which do not register lose the opportunity to claim tax benefits but are not restricted in other ways – and are largely a formal process designed to ensure organisational accountability. But the NGO code in Uganda includes specific provisions that outlaw political activity or ensure that activities remain confined to members' immediate interests. Even if it does not provide funds the state can exert control over finances in other ways. For example, in the case of the UNSA, the Ugandan government collects the membership contributions from educational institutions but this is not carried out systematically and creates financial dependence, which in turn compromises its autonomy and ability to represent its members effectively.

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[16] The South African civic association SANCO and the trade union federation COSATU have few female office-holders, despite the fact that women constitute the bulk of rank and file members (Heller and Ntlokonkulu 2001; Mackay and Mathoho 2001).

It is important to distinguish between distance and autonomy – organisations may sympathise with a political actor, and thus enjoy closeness to it and consequent influence, but remain autonomous because they continue to set their own priorities. If autonomy is understood as distance from the state, the claim that it is essential if civil society organisations are to be effective in influencing the actions and decisions of state actors is not supported by the case study evidence. Proximity to state actors can act as a source of leverage by providing access to decision-makers and enhancing political legitimacy. Tripartite negotiating forums bringing together representatives from business, labour and government provide opportunities for civil society influence. The best example is NEDLAC in South Africa, which provides a consultative forum for government and civil society, enabling COSATU and other union federations to influence some policy issues. In contrast, the Ugandan trade union federation NOTU has not managed to use its presence on tripartite bodies to influence labour legislation in its favour. More informally, the degree to which organisations are politically close to, or share a set of goals with, the governing party are important determinants of influence in any society, including established democracies, and the same pattern can be found in our three country studies.

Autonomy from political actors is also thought to be a necessary attribute of civil society. But this issue is often not addressed with conceptual clarity. If autonomy is understood as the power and right to be accountable primarily to the social constituency which the organisation seeks, directly or indirectly, to represent, then it is an essential pre-requisite to providing citizens with a voice. Thus in non-democratic single-party regimes such as Uganda and Ghana in the late 1960s, or Uganda under the Movement system in the 1990s, this autonomy was and is clearly an essential pre-requisite to citizen participation through civil society organisations. Political parties have sought to control the activities of civil society groups when in government and have sponsored the formation of rival organisations to undermine opponents and advance their political agenda in the civil sphere: the National Resistance Movement in Uganda has sponsored the formation of youth and women's groups that are supportive of its cause. But autonomous organisations may also be close to governing parties because this is the preference of their leaders or constituencies. Our evidence suggests that engagement in political society, through links to political parties or representation in parliament, can offer distinct advantages and potential leverage.

Key civil society organisations in South Africa have maintained close relationships with the ruling ANC and this has in some cases worked to their advantage in widening opportunities for policy dialogue. There has been a cost – many leading members of civil society groups joined the government or entered parliament after the transition to majority rule, depriving the sector of experienced personnel. There is little evidence that this has enhanced policy influence: COSATU twice nominated a slate of unionists to the ANC election list, but found that, as members of the ANC parliamentary caucus, they were expected to place its priorities ahead of those of the unions. The practice has therefore been discontinued. But there are also benefits. COSATU's relationship with the ANC has been instrumental to its successes in policy engagement. Nor has proximity to

the ANC compromised its autonomy or scope for independent action. SANCO and the WNC, both of which have ties with the ANC, have by contrast been relatively unsuccessful in influencing policy. There are specific reasons for this in each case, but there is a common thread: neither can speak on behalf of a strong organised base. This suggests that proximity to government does not guarantee access and effectiveness in the absence of an organised social base which has an effective voice in the organisation and the organisational capacity to turn its preferences into influence.

In Uganda the trade unions have direct political representation in the national parliament through five seats allocated to workers' representatives under the aegis of NOTU, the trade union federation. Although the five nominated by NOTU are known sympathisers of the Movement system of government, they have been able to exercise an independent voice and represent worker's interests in parliamentary debates. NOTU's ineffectiveness in influencing government policy stems from organisational and financial weaknesses, a passive interpretation of its central mandate to promote workers' rights, its opposition to central elements of government policy and, perhaps, the reality that its constituency, organised workers in the formal sector, is not numerically strong in the wider society.

By comparison, the Uganda Manufacturers Association, which represents business interests (with 750 members), does not have parliamentary representation, but has proven markedly more successful in influencing policy than its trade union counterpart, partly by virtue of its access to government decision-makers and its broadly sympathetic stance towards government policy. Its concurrence with the dominant policy agenda, founded on promotion of economic openness and private sector development, provides better access to policy-makers and enables it to exert greater influence on policy than other civil society groups (Barya 2001).

In South Africa and Uganda there are ministers and legislators with dual membership of civil society groups and parliamentary institutions, or who have occupied senior positions in civil society organisations. Much the same, however, can be said of politicians in established democracies. In Uganda, however, it is not unusual for NGOs and other civil society groups to be formed by politicians for personal interest or monetary gain. Supporters of political parties unable to operate legally by virtue of the no-party Movement system of government find refuge in civil society groups. Some take on the functions of parties in holding the state to account and intervening in debate over the constitution and the political system (Oloka-Onyango and Barya 1998).

A further dimension of organisational independence is financial autonomy. Most civil society groups that lack membership structures find it difficult to raise donations from the public, partly on account of limited societal wealth and a relatively small middle class, but also because of perceptions of political partisanship and limited public support for their activities. Financial problems afflict many organisations lacking access to

government and donor finance, since lack of funds makes its more difficult to attract skilled personnel and build institutional capacity. For this reason most civil society organisations have sought financial support from foreign aid donors, and experience high levels of dependence on this source of income.

Membership-based organisations in Uganda, such as NOTU, NAWOU and UNSA, raise some income from their members, though their ability to meet staff and administrative costs is limited. The UMA is unusual in that it raises the bulk of its resources from membership subscriptions and income from an annual trade fair, with only modest support from aid donors for specific capacity-building projects. UNSA also raises most of its income from student subscriptions but is unable to cover its core administrative costs as responsibility for collecting dues from educational institutions lies with the government. NOTU raises limited resources from membership dues, which have been falling in line with trends in union membership, but has to rely on foreign sources for the bulk of its income, without which it could not meet core administrative costs. Similarly DENIVA and HURINET depend heavily on foreign aid for their income and raise only modest amounts from membership fees. NAWOU raises about 25 per cent of its income from subscriptions, marketing and income generation schemes, with the bulk coming from foreign aid donors.

Most Ghanaian civil society organisations also depend heavily on foreign aid, with the exception of peak associations with large or wealthy memberships, such as the Trades Union Congress and the Ghana Bar Association, both of which raise a significant proportion of their resources from membership fees. In the case of the Trades Union Congress all workers are compelled to join and pay membership dues deducted monthly from their salaries. This provides a critical source of finance but does not cover its operating expenses in full and does not enable it to recruit specialist policy and research staff. Commercial ventures have been attempted as a means of raising additional income but with limited success. The Ghana Bar Association has 3,000 members, many of whom are relatively wealthy and middle class, which provide it with a secure source of income. The student union receives contributions from its 15,000 members but suffers from a transient base and a membership that is not well endowed financially (Gyimah-Boadi *et al.* 2000).

A contrasting picture emerges from South Africa, where most civil society organisations depend on internally generated resources. Church-based and membership-based welfare groups formed in the pre-apartheid era continue to receive the bulk of their income from membership fees and private donations (Kihato and Rapoo 1999). Of the six organisations studied, COSATU raises substantial income from union dues and investments, resulting in a high degree of financial independence. FABCOS, SANCO and the WNC also mobilise the bulk of their income from membership subscriptions but are in a weaker financial position. In contrast, IDASA depends to a large extent on foreign contributions, even though it also receives government fees, since it does not have a membership base from which it can mobilise resources and its capacity to generate income from its activities is limited. It does, however, seek to reduce dependency by diversifying its funding sources. Financial security is a characteristic associated with those membership organisations that have had greatest impact on public policy. IDASA, which is effective but has no members,

does have fairly secure resources even if these are raised from donors rather than members. But while an independent base of financial support confers legitimacy, it does not guarantee political efficacy. These issues are considered further in Section 7.

6.3 Participation and accountability

Liberal theorists claim political efficacy is at least partly a consequence of internal accountability. The research undertaken for this project casts doubt on this claim, pointing to a less direct relationship between internal accountability and political efficacy. However, while membership voice does not necessarily translate into influence, it remains vital if civil society organisations are to contribute to the practical realisation of democratic rights.

The research reveals that all but one of the 12 civil society associations, federations and networks in Uganda and South Africa are democratically constituted.[17] In accordance with their constitutional provisions there are regular leadership elections and representation in decision-making bodies by affiliates. Most convene conferences or general assemblies for members and delegates at regular intervals. These, in principle, provide opportunities for internal debate and grassroots inputs into decision-making.

Over 60 per cent of the organisations surveyed in South Africa were classed as democratic or participatory by virtue of procedural devices such as regular internal elections and structured consultation exercises. Membership-based organisations were found to be more open and democratic and participatory in their internal governance than intermediary groups such as church bodies and trusts (Kihato and Rapoo 1999). This may reflect the particular circumstances of South Africa and the legacy of the popular struggle against apartheid during the course of which many groups cultivated democratic practices within their organisational structures. Internal democracy is especially strong in the case of COSATU, whose annual congresses are characterised by very active involvement on the part of rank and file workers, who have considerable influence over decision-making and leadership elections (Mackay and Mathoho 2001).

Most of the membership-based organisations hold regular leadership contests through elections and convene annual conferences for delegates selected by their constituent members that provide opportunities for debate and for members to question leaders on major decisions. This is particularly striking in COSATU's annual conferences where delegates often subject leadership decisions to considerable scrutiny and deliberation. Traditions of internal democracy and leadership accountability are a legacy of the strategies which major trade unions were forced to employ in their fight for recognition: lengthy attempts to pressure unwilling employers into bargaining prompted reliance on forms of organisation which stressed membership participation in forming strategy as well as action. Public displays of independence and contestation on the

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[17]   The one exception was a farmers' organisation in South Africa that was governed by patronage relations and lacked any semblance of internal democracy.

part of members are less readily apparent in more narrowly interest-based associations such as FABCOS and the two farmers' organisations, which are less democratic and have a leadership that is less accountable and more patronage-based.

However, formal democratic procedures are not always followed in practice. FABCOS, SANCO and the WNC in South Africa have become hierarchical and bureaucratic with limited involvement of grassroots members in decision-making and, in some cases, the marginalisation of local branches from national policy decisions, which has led to a reduction in internal democracy. NOTU in Uganda has not held leadership elections every five years as provided for in its constitution, partly because of military rule and civil war and infrequent leadership elections and limited accountability have resulted in financial mismanagement and periodic embezzlement of funds (Barya 2001). In other cases election procedures limit democratic practices and accountability. For example, UNSA, the Ugandan student body, employs a line-up system rather than a secret ballot for leadership elections and elected office-bearers are limited to a one-year term. By comparison, the members of the Uganda Manufacturers Association elect the chair of the executive board, while policy- and decision-making is left to non-elected sub-committees.

Of particular significance from the vantage point of internal democracy is the role of the membership in decision-making and the procedures for electing the leadership and holding it to account. Of the 12 organisations selected for review, only one is not directly or indirectly membership-based (IDASA in South Africa) as it functions as a specialised research and advocacy organisation rather than as a network or federation of other groups, while the two farmers' organisations are local, rather than national, in focus and membership. The size of membership varies considerably: from just 19 member unions in the case of NOTU to over 400 member organisations in the case of DENIVA, the Ugandan NGO network. UMA claims a membership of 750 businesses, with over 400 paid-up members, while NAWOU has 1,500 community-based organisations among its membership. Several of the sector-based unions which affiliate to COSATU and NOTU have memberships in the thousands or tens of thousands, giving them the character of truly mass movements, as compared to the two business associations, whose members are relatively modest in number.

It must be stressed, however, that the absolute numbers represented by an organisation are not the only guide to representativeness: a key consideration is the extent to which organisations represent the constituency for which they speak. A business association which represents a few hundred companies may be largely representative of business while a trade union representing tens of thousand may speak for only a small section of labour. In policy negotiation, ability to speak for a majority in a key social constituency may often be more important than total numbers.

Nor does a large membership guarantee that organisations will be more democratic or representative. SANCO, the national civics organisation in South Africa, claims a mass membership base but lacks democratic credentials, reflected in a hierarchical style of leadership, exclusionary practices and close proximity to the ruling party, even though many local branches function in an open and participatory

manner.[18] The evidence presented here also suggests that, while a mass membership contributes to democratic legitimacy, it does not follow that all membership-based organisations have a proven ability to influence public policy and to contribute effectively to a larger process of democratisation. Besides the point that mass organisations may not be representative of their constituency, numbers must be translated into effectiveness if organisations are to give those for whom they speak a voice.

The claim that internal accountability is a route to efficacy is clearly challenged by the case of IDASA, which has no constituency and exerts influence on the strengths of its claims to expertise. More generally, leadership accountability is a key to efficacy only where demands face resistance (if they do not, merely talking to decision-makers may be enough) and the political circumstances allow sustained action by constituents to translate into outcomes. COSATU's experience, both in its fights for recognition with employers and in its engagement with the ANC government, provides an apt illustration.

 Even where they do not exert policy influence, the role of civil society organisations in providing citizens with an independent sphere of association in which they can participate and deliberate priorities is an important democratising function in its own right, especially when the state is impervious to external influence and circumscribes opposition activity. However, this does not minimise the importance of efficacy, which can ensure that members' voice is also translated into policy outcomes. Membership does not guarantee efficacy, but efficacy is an important means to greater voice.

7 The contribution and impact of foreign aid

The effectiveness of civil society organisations in influencing policy and acting as agents of democratisation is not only shaped by internal organisational factors but is conditioned in significant measure by the availability of resources. The ability of most African civil society organisations to generate adequate funds from indigenous sources is generally constrained by relatively low levels of industrialisation. The middle classes are often key actors in the formation and staffing of civil society organisations but in these countries they lack the wealth and commitment to provide the resources for running costs through donations or structured fund-raising efforts. For this reason, in the three countries under review, only in South Africa are domestic donations a significant source of income and even here international donors are the dominant funding source. Some organisations, such as IDASA, raise resources from fees for training courses and other services, but this is the exception rather than the rule. The only two organisations which mobilise the bulk of their income from internal sources – UMA and COSATU – respectively have wealthy or large memberships from which they levy fees. Most depend heavily on grants from foreign aid donors, which are the principle source of funding

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[18]   It should be stressed here that the civic movement from which SANCO emerged did not in most cases recruit individual members during the fight against apartheid. This ensured that claims of support could not be verified. Current practice appears to be uneven – but recruitment of individual members does not seem to be a universal practice within SANCO. Heller and Ntlokonkulu (2001).

for civil society organisations in most African countries. The expectation of the research was that donors would significantly influence the agendas and impact of civil society organisations by virtue of high levels of aid dependence.

In the 1990s foreign aid donors increasingly sought to work with civil society organisations in Africa to advance democracy and governance objectives. Precise goals vary by country and type of regime, but the main thrust has been to strengthen democracy by subjecting the state to greater citizen oversight, fostering political pluralism and engaging in policy dialogue and advocacy. For example, in Uganda the objective is, it is argued, to widen opportunities for citizen engagement in public policy and to deepen pluralism in the context of the no-party Movement system of government, rather than to support groups advocating an alternative polity (Hearn 1999b). In Ghana, where multi-party democracy has been in place since 1992, the aim is to alter the balance of power between state and civil society by helping organisations tackle the remaining obstacles to liberal democracy (Hearn 2000a). Donors are said to be supporting civil society groups in South Africa to consolidate formal democracy in the post-apartheid era (Hearn 2000b; Landsberg 2000; Kihato 2001).

Some donors also aim to strengthen support for a market-based economy by providing direct financial support to business associations and economic policy research institutes. Some have sought to strengthen private sector involvement in policy-making, through grants to business associations to improve policy research and analysis, and by promoting their involvement in structured policy dialogue with government on budget and taxation issues (Hearn 1999a).

Most bilateral donors and foundations provide financial support to civil society organisations, directly or through northern intermediaries, for building organisational capacity (principally staffing and infrastructure), workshops, research and publications. Donors also seek improvements in the domestic policy and legislative environment to promote a greater role for civil society groups, for example through decentralisation and institutional reforms.[19]

Despite its growing prominence, aid to civil society organisations accounts for only a small proportion of donor democracy assistance programmes, and thus only a very small proportion of overall aid to African countries (Hearn and Robinson 2000). Total donor funding for civil society groups in Ghana and Uganda annually amounts to a few million dollars, which is largely divided into small grants for individual organisations (Hearn 1999a).

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[19]   The United States is the largest aid donor in the scale of financial assistance and the significance of civil society support in its overall aid programme, though other bilateral and multilateral donors have been increasing the amount and proportion of aid allocated for this purpose. In the mid-1990s an estimated 85 per cent of donor support for civil society came from US sources. The other major donors engaged in civil society programmes are the Like-Minded Group and increasingly the UK, the German political foundations and independent US foundations and the World Bank (Hearn 1999a). Also see van Rooy (1998).

While the total funding accounts for a relatively small share of aid flows and grants, most civil society organisations in receipt of foreign funds experience very high levels of aid dependence. Unless they are able to diversify their funding base enough to ensure that they are not dependent on a particular donor, this potentially renders them vulnerable to changes in funding priorities which could compromise their autonomy. Foreign aid has often sustained organisations which cannot easily mobilise domestic resources, and can act as a disincentive to seek local funding to those which have this capacity. In Uganda, several groups receive 80 per cent or more of their funds from overseas sources and in some cases more.[20] Organisations which rely on membership subscriptions and community donations, such as trade unions, professional associations and cultural and religious organisations, are relatively independent since few receive significant foreign funding, although most generate limited funds from these sources. South Africa is more of an exception in this regard since many organisations depend on internally generated resources, principally in the form of membership subscriptions, partly because of a perception of a substantial reduction in donor funding after the transition to majority rule when resources were increasingly directed through government channels. While subsequent research has found that donor flows to civil society have not, in reality, been reduced, the perceived reduction may have prompted a revision of funding strategies. South Africa also has, as noted above, a larger domestic funding base (Swilling and Russell 2002). Both this and greater potential to rely on membership subscriptions may be a consequence of greater industrialisation.

While aid to civil society is not substantial, it is concentrated among a relatively small set of organisations perceived to have the potential to contribute to democratic development through engagement in public policy. In Uganda some 20 organisations were identified as the major recipients of donor democracy assistance and several receive support from multiple sources (Hearn 1999b). Those organisations most commonly favoured by donors for advancing democracy and governance objectives include human rights groups, NGO federations, women's organisations, business and professional associations, trade unions, think tanks and the media. Most have a pronounced urban middle class leadership and have their head offices in towns and cities. This is no accident: aid donors generally prefer to support formal organisations with written constitutions and articles of association which exhibit a high degree of organisational capacity and financial accountability.

This concentration of donor support in a highly select group of organisations can have a detrimental effect on internal organisational capacity and skew the composition of civil society by promoting only those organisations able to meet donor application and reporting requirements. Donor funding priorities significantly influence the agendas, activities and growth trajectories of organisations. Women's associations in all three countries received a considerable infusion of funds from the mid-1980s: the availability of funds for

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[20]   HURINET receives 98 per cent of its funds from foreign donors (Oloka-Onyango 2003).

issues of concern to women stimulated the formation of new organisations. A similar pattern is found with human rights groups and advocacy organisations working on democracy and governance – the availability of funds gives rise to the creation of new organisations geared towards donor objectives.

Donor funding can also worsen conflicts between civil society organisations and so reduce their effectiveness. In Uganda, selective support to rival trade unions by the US and the Soviet Union during the Cold War exacerbated factional and ideological differences, undermining their long-term organisational capacity (Barya 2001). In some circumstances, funding can also encourage misuse of money, helping to corrode the credibility of associations. In South Africa, the transfer of several hundred million dollars to anti-apartheid groups from the mid-1980s, but with very little accountability, resulted in high levels of dependence on foreign funds and periodic scandals centring on alleged misappropriations (Shubane 1999a).

Whether these negative effects are the result of a coherent donor strategy is in dispute. Hearn (1999a) claims that the concentration of foreign aid on a relatively small number of elite intermediaries reflects a deliberate strategy of fostering a restricted vision of democracy, limited to elite competition and representation. She argues that aid donors seek to fund civil society organisations to promote support for economic liberalism and counter more radical visions of democracy based on popular participation and redistribution. This interpretation is questioned for South Africa by Friedman and Reitzes (2001). They acknowledge that donors do have values such as support for liberal democracy. But these are neither covert nor surprising – they are often proclaimed by the donor agencies themselves because they are expressions of the political consensus in the donor country. But they find that donors do not generally operate with a clear strategy which would enable them to meet their political and economic objectives: limited information on and insight into local conditions ensure that funding decisions are often a result of fashion or the desire to please superiors rather than a strategic vision. Nor, they argue, is there a one-way flow of influence between donors and civil society organisations: often the preferences of civil society groups and aid donors reinforce each other. In this conception funding decisions result more from trial and error and a tendency to follow inherited patterns or current fads than from a coherent agenda.

For the purpose of this research, the critical question is the extent to which foreign aid has affected the internal governance and organisational capacity of civil society groups and hence their contribution to democratisation.

In Uganda civil society organisations did not provide an effective challenge to the military and civilian dictatorships of Idi Amin and Milton Obote; nor did they manage to challenge the no-party system and deepen political participation in the 1990s and beyond. A high level of donor support for the Museveni regime and its reform agenda has precluded active encouragement of a democracy agenda and blunted the potential impact of civil society organisations. But the South African research confirms that foreign aid can play a positive role in strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations to contribute to democracy, especially at critical political junctures. This is demonstrated by the very considerable financial support provided to trade

unions, churches and NGOs which spearheaded the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1980s, although most of the funds received by COSATU were from European trade unions rather than conventional aid donors (Shubane 1999a; Landsberg 2000). Sustained non-violent opposition by civil society organisations played a pivotal role in defeating the system when combined with external diplomatic and financial pressure.

COSATU was a key actor in the anti-apartheid struggle and according to Mackay and Mathoho:

> donor funding played a critical role in establishing COSATU during its formative years (the mid 1980s), and formed the bulk of the organisation's funding at that time. This provided COSATU with the means and space to grow into a self-sufficient organisation. Without it the federation would not have been able to build the capacity needed to organise internally and interact with the state and society externally that was necessary for it to grow and expand.
>
> (Mackay and Mathoho 2001: 30)

After the transition to majority rule, COSATU developed the means to raise the bulk of its finances from fees deducted from monthly payrolls of union members, but this was not feasible when the government was oppressing its affiliates and employers were hostile. International funding, especially from sister trade unions and Nordic donors, was indispensable. Financial independence from aid donors in the present context, especially for core operational expenses, means that COSATU is not under pressure to conform to donor preferences and does not need to accept funds from those which may not subscribe to its political programme.

A rather different picture is painted by SANCO's experience of donor funding. As with COSATU, foreign aid, principally from the European Union and USAID, provided invaluable support for the core organisational capacities of the civic movement under apartheid. (Shubane 1999a). According to Heller and Ntlokonkulu:

> Donor funding impacted on the civic movement in two different respects. First, it was critical to scaling the movement up, and sustaining extra-local organisational presence. Financial resources allowed civics not only to build their organisational presence on the ground (e.g. office space, phones, paid community activists) but also allowed civic leaders to network and organise between civics… Second, donor funding supported capacity building in the form of direct training of civic leaders and in the provision of technical assistance to CBOs [community-based organisations]… The considerable negotiating and policy skills that civic leaders brought to the negotiating table in 1992 was in no small part a result of the workshop and capacity building exercises funded by donors.
>
> (Heller and Ntlokonkulu 2001: 52)

Heller and Ntlokonkulu argue that the contribution of foreign funding should not be overplayed since civics had a capacity to mobilise mass action against apartheid before they enjoyed access to donor funding. But they add that the decline in funding after the transition to majority rule weakened organisational capacity at the local level by depriving SANCO officials of opportunities to upgrade their technical skills for more effective involvement in community planning exercises. At the national level SANCO did not succeed in attracting funding for organisation building, partly because of allegations of corruption and leadership factionalism. The withdrawal of donor funding was also due to the changed donor political priorities in the post-apartheid period. According to Heller and Ntlokonkulu (2001: 54), the role that 'oppositional forms of civic engagement can play in strengthening democracy was lost to the strategic importance of providing support to the new government'. Official donors (in contrast to private foundations) increasingly favoured professional non-membership-based organisations which worked in partnership with government rather than those which pursued an advocacy approach or represented the interests of poor grassroots constituencies. The absence of secure funding has meant that SANCO has been unable to consolidate its organisational presence. But a lack of donor support does not seem to have impeded the grassroots civic engagement described by the authors. And lack of funding may be a consequence as well as a cause of its organisational weakness – the approach described here was not universal even among official donors and yet SANCO seems unable to have made an impact on donors who were not committed to giving priority to the new government. That said, the grassroots democratic activity described by the authors would probably not have been visible to donors used to judging organisations by their national leadership. If a paucity of funding indeed hampered grassroots activism, the cause may lie in donor inability to develop an understanding of realities at the base of membership-based civil society organisations with a grassroots support base.

IDASA, by contrast, is a good example of an organisation which receives 90 per cent of its funding from foreign sources but maintains a high degree of independence in framing agendas and determining its priorities, making a significant contribution to public policy. Its promotion of liberal democracy is an objective shared by its funders and its willingness to work with the government conforms to the priorities of most aid donors. A high degree of consonance over broad goals is buttressed by a high level of donor trust both in its demonstrated capacity and internal procedures for ensuring financial accountability – indeed, its competence in financial reporting appears to account for its popularity among donors more than its political message (Friedman and Reitzes 2001). IDASA has employed two strategies to ensure that it can shape its own agenda: active diversification of funds on each major programme to prevent ownership or undue influence by any single donor, and the creation of an undesignated endowment to enable it to pursue its own priorities. While it has had to accommodate to donor preferences on account of funding exigencies, 'it has had considerable leeway in shaping the nature of that response. It may be more appropriate to see the relationship as a two-way

one in which recipients influence donors but are in turn influenced by them' (Kabemba and Friedman 2001: 16). Aid donors view IDASA as a useful partner in their efforts to strengthen democratic institutions in post-apartheid South Africa, though support for IDASA may not form part of a considered strategy.

IDASA in turn benefits by virtue of the legitimacy it has acquired in its work with government. Critics would argue that working closely with government forecloses other options predicated on a more active watchdog role in which it assumes a more independent stance working on behalf of citizens. A further issue is whether coooperation with government diminishes or enhances citizen voice. Civil society organisations can promote democracy when they lack a mass base which participates in decisions. Advocacy organisations without members can strengthen democracy by initiating public debate on, and assembling a coalition behind, alternative proposals. But the approach suggested here implies that they should be judged by the degree to which they are able to promote wide public participation in discussion on alternatives to current policy and practice. It is this standard, rather than the expectation that they directly mobilise citizens, by which the democratic contribution of organisations such as IDASA should be judged. And it is certainly possible that close cooperation with the government could prompt the use of lobbying methods which do not allow citizens a voice.

Several organisations received little by way of funding from foreign aid and have relied more on domestic sources, but with varying consequences for internal governance and political efficacy. FABCOS leveraged support from white corporations in the early years of its existence and gradually moved towards financial self-sufficiency through income from a private equity fund used to fund black business investments. Foreign aid was provided for specific projects and training and for office infrastructure and equipment, but it never became a dominant source of income and such support ended in 1998. Donors, domestic corporate and foreign, endorsed the objective of black economic empowerment and did not question the basic competence of the organisation. FABCOS was perceived to hold the promise of a de-racialised capitalism and a source of restraint on government, but in reality it advocated greater government intervention in favour of its members' interests. FABCOS has neither had a significant impact on policy nor has it contributed to democratic governance by holding government to account or providing a voice to its members, who are reduced to passive consumers of services. Hence while it has managed to achieve organisational sustainability and financial independence, FABCOS did not contribute to democratisation in any meaningful manner, leading to the conclusion that 'official donor intervention in particular lacks the strategic grasp of South African conditions to ensure that interventions aimed at democratisation are likely to achieve their stated goals' (Hlophe *at al.* 2001).

The Women's National Coalition presents a case in which lack of clarity on objectives and administrative weaknesses stymied donor funding, which had played a significant role in sustaining its activities at the outset. Foreign donors prefer to support networks and organisations working on clearly defined gender issues such as domestic violence rather than a national network which lacks strategic focus and the capacity to use funds

effectively. The absence of a clear focus, its low visibility and inability to influence policy has consigned it to a marginal role in gender policy debates. While this has been compounded by the disinclination of donors to offer financial support (Gershater 2001), the conclusion that internal weakness explained the lack of funding more than the funding shortage accounted for this, is even clearer in this case than in SANCO's.

Some civil society organisations never receive support from foreign donors and this can affect their capacity to make claims on the state and to act as conduits for effective participation on behalf of their members in the absence of other sources of income. Some organisations decline funding from foreign sources on the grounds that it may compromise their legitimacy and autonomy. Others prefer to access funds from government or corporate sources. More commonly, certain organisations may not be eligible for donor support as they are not formally constituted or their activities do not conform to donor priorities. This is the case with the two farmers' organisations in North West Province, which were selected on the grounds that they represent associations in rural South Africa that generally do not receive assistance from aid donors but illustrate the challenges facing an approach to democracy enhancement premised on investing in grassroots organisations. The advocacy efforts of the associations are focused on leveraging basic services and agricultural inputs from the state, but with limited effectiveness. They differ in their internal practices, with one characterised by relations of dependence and patronage, the other seeking to advance transparency, equality and the material conditions of its members. This demonstrates that there are democratically constituted grassroots organisations which could potentially benefit from an infusion of external support. But they lack information about donor programmes, while donor agencies are not in a position to monitor the activities of remote grassroots organisations, which makes the use of funding intermediaries unavoidable (Mathoho and Schmitz 2001). Whether that support should consist mainly of funding for the organisation's activities is, however, far from clear. A subsequent study has found considerable resistance among grassroots rural organisations to receiving donor funding – the organisations fear that they would be unable to absorb the money and that it would do more to destabilise them than to capacitate them. The study concluded that an approach which funded linkages – events and processes which placed grassroots organisations in touch with sources of influence and support in the society – might be more appropriate to their needs than infusions of money for operational costs (Centre for Policy Studies 2002). However, the two examples also suggest that, while the lack of funding for grassroots organisations in rural and peri-urban areas does, as we have argued, pose a challenge to donors interested in supporting attempts to ensure that citizens enjoy greater voice, these organisations differ considerably in the degree to which they offer members an opportunity to participate in decisions. Romanticising grassroots organisations may be as unproductive as ignoring them and an enhanced role in supporting organisations at the grassroots may require much greater donor ability to distinguish between democratic organisations and those who speak about, but not for, their members.

Ugandan civil society organisations invariably depend to a far greater extent than their South African counterparts on foreign aid. Of the six organisations surveyed for this research only one – the Uganda Manufacturers Association – raises the bulk of its resources from membership fees, as well as from income from an annual trade fair and training and consultancy services. This is hardly surprising since business associations tend to have relatively stable memberships rooted in companies with the capacity to pay fees. The UMA does receive some grants from aid donors for business training and information projects rather than core operating expenses but these do not account for a significant share of its income and have little bearing on its core mandate and range of activities. Financial self-sufficiency and UMA's ability to pay the salaries of dedicated policy staff who have received training funded by foreign donors is undoubtedly a factor in its success in influencing policy and legislation.

In contrast, NOTU is, unlike COSATU, unable to cover its operational costs. Trade union federations in Uganda have always relied heavily on external support, primarily from sister organisations and confederations. By the mid-1990s, over 90 per cent of NOTU's income came from foreign donations, principally from union sources or political foundations, and the bulk was used to meet administrative expenses. However, concerns about financial mismanagement resulted in sharp curbs on external funding by 1996 and a consequent donor preference for project support. As a result NOTU has not managed to create effective organisational structures and has difficulty in paying rent, salaries and other administrative costs. This in turn inhibits its ability to influence policy and legislation, since the resources are not in place to support full-time professional staff that could carry out these activities.

Barya (2001) identifies three problems with foreign funding to NOTU. First, as noted above, ideological divisions in the Ugandan trade union movement during the Cold War were fuelled by external support from rival international confederations aligned with one of the superpowers and their allies. Second, foreign contributions exacerbated factional conflicts in the union movement since leadership struggles often centred on access to power and resources. Third, foreign aid undermined NOTU's viability and independence. Its dependence on foreign funds to meet core administrative costs meant that it did not ensure that its affiliates paid their monthly contributions, which weakened their commitment to NOTU. Despite having 19 affiliate unions with a large membership NOTU has been unable to capitalise on this base as a source of dependable funding. While foreign donors could have assisted NOTU in establishing effective organisational structures and a strategy for sustainable resource mobilisation, it is evident that factional rivalries and financial mismanagement did not incline them towards core organisational support, thus contributing to a self-reinforcing process of organisational decline.

HURINET depends on foreign aid for around 90 per cent of its income, half of which came from a single donor for the period 1997–2000 and the balance in the form of targeted assistance for particular projects. At this juncture funds from affiliate contributions barely cover 10 per cent of its budget, and these are often late or not paid in full. For the foreseeable future HURINET will depend on foreign aid though this

is not considered problematic by the organisation, despite the demands entailed in making grant applications, monitoring and reporting. NAWOU is in a similar position since it raises the bulk of its resources from foreign aid donors and only a modest amount from internal sources. Both recognise the advantages of secure long-term institutional support and the need to achieve a greater measure of self-sufficiency but have not been able to mobilise significant levels of income from fund-raising efforts. Their limited contribution to national policy debate is not explained by dependence on donor funds, but rather by organisational priorities centred on servicing members and a government which actively discourages advocacy efforts centred on democratic reforms.

DENIVA also depends largely on donor funds and raises little by way of contributions from the network members. Like HURINET and NAWOU much time is spent on developing funding proposals, a problem common to many civil society organisations. It faces difficulty in raising funds since it competes with members in furnishing proposals to donors and with other issue-based networks. DENIVA's lack of a firm financial base reinforces its tendency to avoid controversial issues and advocacy approaches, but again donor dependence is not the main reason for its stance. UNSA is in a different category since it relies exclusively on membership contributions and is very weak financially and organisationally. As a student membership organisation it is not in a strong position to attract donor support, and it plays a very marginal role in education policy debates, partly on account of its weak financial position.

The funding situation in Ghana is similar to that in Uganda with most civil society organisations engaged in democracy and governance work depending heavily on foreign aid (Hearn 2000a). Even organisations that successfully mobilise domestic contributions rely on grants from aid donors. For example, while the Ghana Bar Association covers a good proportion of its operating costs from membership fees it also receives foreign aid for specific projects and training activities. Grants are often disbursed in small amounts, directly by bilateral and multilateral aid donors or through intermediaries and foundations. Despite problems of dependence, foreign aid provided Ghanaian civil society organisations with the organisational strength and confidence to advocate for political change through multi-party elections and sustained many during conditions of financial austerity (Drah and Oquaye 1996; Gyimah-Boadi and Oquaye 2000).

In sum, the case study evidence confirms that many organisations are heavily dependent on foreign aid and that this can have perverse effects such as distorting their priorities. But dependence on foreign aid does not always produce deleterious effects, especially when used effectively and strategically by recipient organisations. Nor does foreign aid necessarily compromise their objectives, limit their credibility or skew their agendas as civil society organisations employ institutional devices to maintain their independence and legitimacy. The research demonstrates that foreign aid can play a benign and supportive role to the political efficacy of recipient organisations, but only if organisations are able to make effective use of funding and the domestic environment is conducive to influence.

Much the same can be said of the influence of donor funding on the internal governance of organisations – and, therefore, on whether they offer their constituency a voice in decisions. In some cases, funding may have reduced pressures for internal accountability and participation by setting priorities which constituencies have never endorsed or by privileging modes of dealing with government which exclude the participation of constituents. But COSATU's experience shows that initial infusions of aid can assist organisations which are interested in using the funding to strengthen the participation of their members in the organisation and in society. The effect of funding on internal governance seems to depend, therefore, on the degree to which organisations are committed to democratic governance and aware enough of their own priorities to know how to use funding to strengthen it in their organisations. Donor funding may assist democratic internal governance where civil society organisations are inclined towards and equipped for it. But it will not induce internal democracy where the conditions which nurture it do not exist.

8 Conclusions and policy implications

8.1 Empirical findings

A major finding from the research is that few civil society organisations have achieved significant policy impact – and that two of the three which have achieved impact are not dependent on donor funding: COSATU in South Africa and the Uganda Manufacturers Association. Both have managed to influence policy and legislation in their respective spheres of interest due to specific features of their organisational structure and specific relationship with their respective governments. Both mobilise the bulk of their operational expenses from membership subscriptions and draw very selectively on foreign aid, usually to finance specific projects. They also benefit from perceived legitimacy among government officials, either by virtue of historical factors or broad complementarity of objectives, which provides them with privileged access to the policy realm. Both organisations have established specialised policy departments that conduct analysis, undertake advocacy and lobbying work and represent their views in consultative forums, all of which provide the capacity required for exercising influence.

IDASA has also registered success in its policy engagement with government, but for somewhat different reasons. It does not have a membership base and relies heavily on support from aid donors, but has a high degree of organisational capacity, which enables it to conduct well-conceived and effective policy interventions. In contrast, donor-funded organisations in Ghana and Uganda have generally proved ineffective in their efforts to influence government policy and legislation.

Donor funding for civil society policy advocacy has not, therefore, made a major impact on civil society policy engagement in the three countries. This is not to insist that donors have had no impact on democratisation at all – in some cases, as with initial support for COSATU (most of which was mobilised by

Scandinavian unions) or more general backing for the anti-apartheid movement, donors have had a beneficial impact (Shubane 1999a). Positive impact seems to occur where they are able to strengthen existing democratising trends – attempts to create them seem destined to fail.

Mass membership does not appear to be an essential pre-requisite for contributing to public policy, but it can generate resources which make effective lobbying and advocacy possible. Strong traditions of internal democracy are not essential pre-requisites of political efficacy but they ensure the leadership accountability and membership involvement which, we have argued, is essential if organisations are to perform the prime democratic function of giving citizens voice.

Close proximity to government can have contradictory effects. Where organisations seek to use it as a substitute for building independent capacity, it compromises both their capacity to speak for members and the ability to influence government policy priorities, as the cases of SANCO and FABCOS show. Where it becomes a resource used to pursue members' concerns, it can facilitate access and influence.[21] As noted above, donor funding has in some cases helped strengthen tendencies towards democratic internal governance among organisations but has not been able to create movement in that direction where an inclination towards it did not already exist.

Our analysis points to three critical ingredients in successful policy engagement by civil society organisations: strong organisational capacity, a high degree of perceived political legitimacy and access to government officials, and adequate financial resources, whether derived from internal or external sources. Foreign aid is not the most critical determinant of successful policy engagement: the character of a particular organisation and its specific relationship to the state are decisive. But resources do matter, since the least effective organisations in terms of policy engagement (UNSA and NOTU in Uganda and SANCO in South Africa) are also the least well endowed financially.

The studies demonstrate that the contribution made by civil society organisations to democracy is not only manifest in the extent of their ability to influence policy and legislation. If measured on the basis of this criterion alone their impact would be judged to be very minimal. But the evidence demonstrates that the contribution of civil society organisations to democracy extends to their ability to foster participation and deliberation, to build leadership capacity and to nurture values of tolerance and consensus building, all of which are a function of internal democratic practices. Its capacity to offer citizens a say in decisions and to enhance pluralism may be as important as the ability to influence decision-making and demand accountability from state actors. These findings question inflated expectations of the policy-influencing potential of civil

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[21]   This finds support in a conclusion derived from the South African cases, which 'do not support the argument that a partnership or alliance with government is automatically a constraint to the autonomy or efficacy of CSOs' (Friedman and Reitzes 2001: 19).

society (Hansen 1996; Hadenius and Uggla 1996). In practice, this contribution remains modest and limited to relatively few organisations with a distinct set of organisational characteristics in specific policy and political contexts.

8.2 Theoretical issues

The findings of this research also have implications for theories of civil society and democracy. Aspects of the framework developed by Hadenius and Uggla (1996) that was employed for this study seem open to serious theoretical question. The framework relies on a liberal pluralist model which assumes that all citizens enjoy the capacity to influence government decisions – civil society's capacity to exert influence is, therefore, a function of how it is organised rather than external constraints. But this implied assertion that all citizens enjoy the power to influence government decisions assumes a set of liberal democratic institutions – free and fair elections, the freedom to participate in autonomous organisations outside the realm of the state, an elected legislature, an independent judiciary and an accountable political executive – which are hardly universal and are not fully in place in the countries under review.[22] While South Africa and Ghana are functioning multi-party democracies, neither is fully responsive to citizens: liberal democratic norms may be present in some institutions and procedures, but absent in others because democratic institutions are still maturing in these countries (Robinson and White 1998; Bastian and Luckham 2003). It also assumes that all citizens have an equal opportunity to participate in liberal democratic institutions, an assumption which seems to ignore a range of factors ensuring differential access, from social and economic inequality and its consequences – limited formal education, few organisational resources and in some societies limited or no access to the language of government and public debate – to political difference from the governing party to, in some societies, identity differences such as race, gender or religion.

The framework also seems to be over-prescriptive in its requirements for a civil society which strengthens democracy. It mandates particular strategies, such as the formation of networks, for example, and organisational forms – the insistence on a "multi-layered" organisation or having a presence in different parts of a country – which seem to be a matter of choice for particular organisations rather than a precondition for strengthening democracy. This is ironic, given the framework's justifiable concern for pluralism: it is unclear why a plurality of organisations is considered necessary but a diversity of strategies and organisational forms is not. This is a substantive point, since a common criticism of donor approaches to civil society is that they tend to favour organisations which adopt particular strategies and organisational choices over others without any evidence that either is necessary for the effectiveness of civil society organisations. The framework seems to provide intellectual support for this approach, but without building a compelling argument in its defence.

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[22] In Uganda, for example, there are curbs on the freedoms of political parties and independent organisations and elections to the legislature are held on a no-party basis.

Finally, the framework fails to stress surely the most important rationale for the formation of civil society organisations in a democracy – that they provide citizens with a voice in public policy debates. This seems more central than any other consideration. It is surely trite to note that democracy is, by definition, is a system in which citizens rule, albeit not directly but by electing representatives. The measure of the democratic quality of a polity is, therefore, the degree to which all citizens are able to participate in deliberation on public policy formulation and implementation as well as on the performance of public representatives and servants. Citizen voice, and the potential to translate it into decisions if majority support can be secured, is both the defining feature of democracy and the means by which government is held accountable to, and forced to respond to, citizens. In this framework, however, voice and participation within organisations, although valued, is relegated to a means to an end – either as a form of civic education or as a guarantor of policy influence. Its failure to place voice at the centre of civil society's rationale may also lead it to invert the relationship between internal governance of organisations and effectiveness. If it is agreed that voice and the right to participate are the central democratic principles, then democracy within organisations is essential because it gives members a say in framing policy demands or proposals and ensures that political efficacy is being exercised on behalf of citizens. Policy influence is important, but not as an end in itself but because it enables that voice to shape events in society. Voice within organisations is not a means to effectiveness – effectiveness is a means to the expression of voice in concrete outcomes.

Voice is not, of course, unlimited. Many of the desiderata raised by the analytical framework – pluralism, tolerance, respect for law and procedure – are crucial to the democratic expression of voice. Nor are questions of organisational capacity and effectiveness irrelevant. But the approach proposed here suggests that they are important because they determine whether voice is expressed and citizenship rights are thus realised.

8.3 Policy implications

The research findings have implications for donor policy and practice. The problems of donor funding examined in Section 7 lead some commentators to conclude that foreign aid to civil society organisations has pernicious effects and should be curbed or terminated (Hearn 1999a; Howell 2000). However, others argue that the potential contribution of civil society organisations to democracy would be negligible in view of the limited sources of indigenous funding (Gyimah-Boadi *et al.* 2000). The challenge for aid policy is to determine the most appropriate forms of external support, to specify the conditions under which such assistance would be most effective and to broaden the range of organisations in receipt of foreign aid. Such an approach would redress some of the deficiencies observed in the research by reducing problems of excessive dependence on external resources, strengthening organisational capacity and fostering greater pluralism, all of which would have a positive bearing on political efficacy and potential to contribute to democracy.

The research has shown how a small number of urban-based intermediaries led by middle class elites command a disproportionate share of foreign aid resources. Many of these organisations exert a limited influence on public policy and do not make an enduring contribution to democracy through their activities. Donors should therefore review the range of civil society organisations targeted through democracy assistance programmes to ensure that groups in rural or urban low-income areas and those with a mass membership also receive adequate support. This approach would have the advantage of strengthening organisations that represent poorer groups and potentially increase the diversity of perspectives under a democratic system. But this does not mean that increased support to grassroots organisations would necessarily strengthen democracy, since many are exclusive in their membership (by gender and ethnicity), are not transparent in their internal affairs and are not accountable their members. Efforts to increase funding to grassroots organisations can also be thwarted by formal requirements of registration and financial accountability, as well as by the logistical challenge of supporting large numbers of small organisations, which often necessitates an intermediary organisation to disburse and monitor grants.[23]

The case studies demonstrate that key donor assumptions about the effect of supporting civil society organisations are flawed and that such funding often does not have the desired effect. The finding that donor support can strengthen existing inclinations towards democratic internal governance or increase political efficacy but that funding which has had this effect is a rarity suggests that donors often lack the understanding of the organisations in their environment which would enable them to identify participatory and potentially effective organisations. Obviously, the more the capacity to develop this understanding is enhanced, the greater the potential effectiveness of such interventions. But since there may be inevitable limits to the degree to which donors can identify complex dynamics in a foreign environment (Friedman and Reitzes 2001), this may also suggest a need for approaches which allow organisations interested in democratisation to identify themselves, such as the linkage approach suggested above which does not seek to identify appropriate organisations but to create processes in which they will emerge (Centre for Policy Studies 2002). Whatever approach is adopted, however, the criterion that support should foster citizen voice in organisations and in society is paramount.

This concern does not negate the importance of organisational capacity and political efficacy in organisations which can offer citizens a voice. Where organisations fit that description, aid donors could play a role in strengthening organisational capacity through a set of discrete measures and changes in funding practices. First, it would be advantageous to replace periodic grant support with long-term programme grants and technical assistance designed to build organisational capacity by strengthening fundraising mechanisms,

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[23] These concerns are raised by Mathoho and Schmitz in their case study of the two farmers' organisations in the North West Province of South Africa (2001: 6, 9).

financial management systems and internal governance.[24] This would have the added advantage of providing financial security during periods of organisational growth and consolidation, reducing the need to invest scarce resources in soliciting funds on a project by project basis. Second, aid donors could provide specialised assistance aimed at strengthening capacity for policy analysis and advocacy, especially for organisations lacking these skills. Donors can also help to create opportunities for structured policy dialogue with governments for a more representative set of membership-based organisations and grassroots coalitions. At the same time, however, the principle that organisations operating in a democracy enjoy the right, within the law, to articulate their interests in a manner of their choosing – such as protest marches or public meetings – rather than purely through structured engagement with government is crucial to a donor strategy likely to foster democratisation.

Third, problems of financial dependence, reduced legitimacy and erosion of autonomy which arise from heavy reliance on foreign aid could be mitigated by the adoption of strategies designed to identify and institutionalise local sources of funding from membership dues, indigenous philanthropy and internally generated sources of income. Fourth, aid donors should seek to promote a more supportive policy environment for civil society organisations by encouraging governments to remove restrictive controls and simplify registration procedures. Such measures would contribute to increased organisational capacity with a view to building political efficacy for a wider and more representative range of civil society organisations, with positive implications for strengthening democracy through autonomous civic action.

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[24] Such support was of critical importance for many civil society organisations in South Africa in the early years of their creation and enabled them to develop independent sources of funding over time (Shubane 1999b).

Annex

Table A.1 Organisational attributes of civil society organisations in South Africa and Uganda

	Membership size	**Financial base**	**Internal governance**	**Organisational capacity**	**Political efficacy**
South Africa					
South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO)	4,000 branches	Membership fees	Regular leadership elections/ moderate accountability	Low	Low
Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)	1.8 million members	Membership fees, investments	Regular leadership elections/high accountability	High	High
Foundation of African Business and Consumer Services (FABCOS)	N/A	Membership fees	Irregular elections/low accountability	Low	Low
Women's National Coalition (WNC)	N/A	Membership fees	Irregular elections/low accountability	Low	Low
Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA)	None	Foreign aid	Board oversight/high accountability	High	High
Farmers' associations in North West Province	N/A	Membership fees	No elections/low accountability	Low	Low

	Membership size	**Financial base**	**Internal governance**	**Organisational capacity**	**Political efficacy**
Uganda					
Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Organisations (DENIVA)	400 organisations	Foreign aid	Regular elections/ moderate accountability	Moderate	Low
Uganda National Students Association (UNSA)	N/A	Membership fees	Regular elections/low accountability	Low	Low
National Organisation of Trade Unions (NOTU)	19 affiliate unions	Membership fees, some foreign aid	Periodic elections/ moderate accountability	Low	Low
Uganda Manufacturers Association (UMA)	750 companies	Membership fees, some grants	Regular elections/high accountability	High	High
National Association of Women Organisations in Uganda (NAWOU)	1,500 member organisations	Foreign aid, some membership fees	Regular elections/high accountability	Moderate	Moderate
Human Rights Network (HURINET)	23 member organisations	Foreign aid, some membership fees	Regular elections/high accountability	Moderate	Low

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