Introduction

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Introduction

The most crucial and endemic problem that Africa has faced since independence has been its inability to embark on a meaningful path of development and to achieve a level of well-being deemed satisfactory for a sizeable proportion of its population (Ndulu et al. 1998:4, McNamara 1991:2-4). Traditional indicators (GNP per capita) and, of recent, indicators taking into consideration general social conditions (human development index) have not been very encouraging and have at times degenerated into real misery. It has become widely accepted that some of these failures have largely been due to the insertion of the attempts at development within the confines of the state as it exists in Africa (Ake 1992:10). However, the alternatives proposed within the context of conventional liberal thinking have not only failed but have led to misery for large segments of society as structural adjustment has often resulted in de-structuring (Ben Hammouda 1998:18, Dembele 1998:10). This is happening, as there is general pressure to liberalise and to open up both political and economic space for transnational political and economic interests (Sachs 1995:2), which Dembele (op cit.:10) refers to as 'Africa's... recolonisation'. These developments are taking place in a context where people are little informed (and even misinformed) of key issues and where they can neither influence nor participate in determining what is best for them. The liberal-democratic experiment forced through during the 1990s has met with the most glaring failures and reversals to the extent that the hopes offered by the project are likely to lead to deep frustration. One needs to remark that this is occurring in a context where Africans are led to perceive this project as the only viable one, a fact which is likely to deepen the frustration when all else comes to a halt. The present context is dominated by the 'grip of ideology and doctrine, including the doctrines crafted to induce hopelessness, resignation and despair' (Chomsky 1997:243).

The euphoria that accompanied independence in Africa is thus giving way to despair as efforts at development and nation building have failed (Amin 1998:169).

Despite recent indicators of a timid progress in the economy no African country is spared the present crisis (Amin ibid., McNamara 1991:2-4). The end of the Cold War was characterised by optimism as the pressures of alignment characteristic of that era gave way to the possibility for the search for new solutions to the crisis. This was however short-lived as it was perceived by the capitalist centre as an opportunity to complete its project of creating a one-dimensional world in its own image. This explains the pressure exerted on poorer countries, which had not yet adopted market driven strategies to do so. For example, when Cameroon adopted the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) it did so reluctantly and has been equally reluctant in its implementation. Recourse to the Washington Consensus has meant compliance with pre-conditions, some of which are of a non-economic nature. It is in this context that political pluralism was born. In other words, the growth of political parties and the effervescence of social movements are concomitant with this process of economic adjustment. When political parties were legalised in Cameroon in the early 1990s there was optimism, as expressed in the slogans of change, as they came to be aligned with other social movements proposing a new vision for society. More than a decade after it is necessary to reflect on the balance sheet of these developments. The aim of this project is to evaluate the potential of civil society social movements in providing alternative solutions to the present development crisis that affects Cameroon as an African case study.

A multidimensional crisis rocks the very basis of the state and the nation building project in Cameroon as elsewhere in Africa. In the political domain the legitimacy of the state has been called into question with the rise of regional (cf. Nkwi and Nyamnjoh 1997) and counter-hegemonic movements (Yenshu Vubo 1998a, Burnham 1996), a crisis of democratic participation manifested in increasing voter apathy, the transformation of the single-party structure into a hegemonic party and the growth of political violence in both subtle legitimate and overt illegitimate forms. In the economic sphere the crisis manifests itself in the inability of the modern state to generate a viable strategy, project or programme for building a sustainable economy with a level of autonomy and meaningful integration into the world economy.

We can identify the following characteristics of the crisis situation. The Structural Adjustment Programme proposed by the Washington Consensus has been unable to usher in the building blocks of a viable economy without generating mass suffering. Most economic policies and programmes are dependent on external dictates and therefore are cut off from local realities or unresponsive to local needs, resulting in dependency. There is a disproportionate stress on the achievement of macro-economic indicators in total disregard of relations between these indicators and micro-level facts. The insistence on conforming to standards of performance set by the Washington Consensus, be it in the domain of politics (good governance) or the economy (the achievement of macro-economic

indicators), without any real relation to local concerns provokes a new crisis of the state wherein international sovereignty is not matched with internal legitimacy. This state of affairs is, for example, reflected in rural economic activity with the disengagement of the state and the multiplication of ineffective policies (see Yenshu Vubo 1998b).

In the social domain there are distortions at both vertical and horizontal level. At the horizontal level there is the resurfacing of ethnic and regional cleavages, as separatist tendencies constitute a real challenge to the nation-building project. For now, the balance sheet of the national unity or integration programme is far from illuminating (Nkwi and Nyamnjoh, op cit.). One can then ask the question whether it is possible for Cameroonians to feel Cameroonian and treat others as equal in terms of citizenship. Such a question implies that we examine the conditions of reciprocity: is this symmetrical or asymmetrical? Recent manifestations seem to put assumption of symmetry and integration into question. At the vertical level one may need to highlight the social dislocations evident in the social fabric: the poor handling of workers' social security by the monolithic state structures, the rise in the number of abandoned street children, peasant pauperisation with the withdrawal of state support and orientation, rising youth unemployment, juvenile delinquency, inter-generational conflicts, deterioration in workers' conditions and urban crime. These developments are exacerbated with the reorientation of social policy under pressure to conform to the neo-liberal model. Policies and strategies are incoherent and commitment half-hearted although good intentions are not lacking.

One may also question the state's response to the environmental crisis. Issues central to this concern are desertification, natural hazards and disasters (draught, earthquakes, gas explosions, landslides, floods), depletion of forests, soil erosion due to intense uncontrolled human activity, and massive destruction of crops by animals and insect pests. Subsidiary issues whose importance might not be very apparent are the questions of gas emissions, pollution, urban waste disposal and the emission of radioactive substances. Some of these concerns are specific to Cameroon but most of them transcend the national borders with some even directly linked to international or transnational phenomena (dumping, the uncontrolled importation of potentially dangerous equipment, the greenhouse effect, depletion of the ozone layer). The state, as erstwhile principal development agent, has not addressed the environmental question according to its manifestations but has simply acted according to the prevailing fashions or in response to international discourses and practices. At times the actions of the state have tended to contradict discourses at both national and transnational levels. This is principally the case with the issue of re-forestation that at certain moments did not match the rate of depletion. The exploitation of forest resources was largely uncontrolled by the state as the need to replenish state coffers tended to override the need to preserve the environment or to conform to international norms. Besides, the

monitoring of natural hazards and the provision of social services to victims has not yet been the systematic concern of the state (Omboui-Bogui 1995:45-46). There is no concerted effort to forestall large-scale hazards like desertification, a phenomenon that is manageable. The failure of the state in the environmental sector implies a failure to provide a comfortable and sustainable framework for national existence.

The solutions proposed are varied and reflect the visions which they evoke. Two tendencies emerge. Conservative visions are basically sectional and are confined to specific university disciplines. This reflects the tendency of one-dimensional modernity to split reality into multiple fragmented facets (Marcuse 1967). Hence, economics would treat each of these problems as if the economic were the only or the major reality that underlies the causes of the multidimensional crisis. Political analysts would also tend to analyse the issues only in terms of the failure of the political system, in this case the pseudo-collectivist model inspired by the Cold War period or the post-Cold War fads such as good governance. As such, the solutions proposed all tend to stress the need to increase political participation at both the individual and community levels. Sociologists or anthropologists, who are also called in to propose their sociologism or humanism, insist almost entirely on the primacy of their conceptual frameworks. All these are inscribed within the liberal paradigm that is gaining new ground and which is propagated in the name of globalisation. It has to be noted that the ultra-liberal paradigm is gaining grounds not on intellectual (that is, on tested facts) but on ideological and political grounds (Amin 1994:15; 1998:39). It has to be borne in mind that the legitimacy of this model is derived from its success in the international competition with the communist model and should not therefore be confused with its operational value or treated as an indicator of its validity. This model leads to new openings but predominantly within the market-dominated model of economy, society and polity. As such, social groups, collective action and the state are considered as obstacles to the creation of the new society or the realisation of the only viable model of society. Proponents of this vision behave as if this was the only model or as if African societies were entrapped within it; in other words, we are informed that other models are doomed to failure even when there is no proof of the total success of the neo-liberal vision.

An alternative radical vision would transcend the present attempts at liberalisation that seem to situate the problems at the level of the state alone. In fact it operates a radical break with the traditional and extremist version of liberalism by situating the solution within the dynamics of the society. As such, the principal objective of the economy would be to promote and contribute to the well-being of all persons and not only prosperity for a few persons or an increase in global national indicators with regard to the economy. The economy should neither be determined exclusively by the private sector to the exclusion and subordination of large segments of society nor should it be driven by the search

for surplus value or maximum growth without an impact on social welfare, with due regard to disadvantaged groups such as the poor, youth, women and peasants. Another threat to social conditions comprises the kind of industrialisation that leads to an imbalance in social groups, categories and regions within the national sphere. This certainly calls for a certain co-ordination role for the state and an active involvement of the society (or civil society) in the economy. There has been talk about a social economy but a radical vision would go beyond, to define new roles for economic, political and social actors (state, individuals, groups, communities) (cf. Yenshu Vubo 1997).

The Question of the Search for Development Alternatives

We choose to define development, in the context of this work, as a movement from a set of conditions (social, material, political, cultural) defined as undesirable or the cause of adverse effects to another set deemed necessary for promoting well-being. Such a simple operational definition will help us to overcome the hurdle of an absolutist judgmental end point. This is so because the definition of these sets of conditions has been changing with ideological shifts, for example, the movement from an economistic (material) to a humanistic perspective (witness the recent abandonment of the physical quality of life index in favour of the human development index).With the shifts, threshold levels also become a shaky issue. We are therefore not concerned with the question of surmounting threshold levels but with examining political projects (policies) aimed at facilitating the transition process within the development continuum, i.e. from the undesirable to the preferred or necessary set of conditions. Although there has however been no consensus on the modalities of transition from one state to another, each development effort has been accompanied by attempts at providing a conceptual framework to the understanding or interpretation of the problems, which serves to guide action.

Africa and the Development Concern

The changing mood in the theorisation of development has affected the African situation both in its intellectual climate and the strategies of development. Although situated in an internationalised environment, Africa's development problems are specific. In arguing for the uniqueness of the problematic of Africa's development in the Third World, Ekeh (1986) notes that, in the same way as in the Industrial Revolution, development thinking has oscillated between moods of optimism and pessimism, this situation following the oscillation between boom and depression that has characterised the world economy during the twentieth century. Historically, by the 1950s no efforts were made at conceptualising development in Africa - the latter still falling largely under the influence of colonial domination. Any concern with development was geared towards the study of involuntary social change in response to opportunities offered by contacts with the metropolitan centre of

the colonial system with which the rest of the world was in contact. The theories, as elsewhere, were ahistorical and did not go beyond the colonial era, as was characteristic of modernisation theory which was built on the belief in the capacity of Africa and indeed all formerly colonised areas to follow in the path of European civilisation (cf. Long 1977). The influence of modernisation theory persisted into the period of independence and gained much official support. As a policy it was optimistic and at the ideological level it was prompted by Cold War rivalries. Modernisation theory failed in Africa, Ekeh argues, because the new states on which the hopes of 'modernisation-development' were founded were frail and fraught with the germs of disintegration.

This view was advanced much earlier from a Marxist perspective by Claude Ake (1978:66) when he argued that the African ruling classes 'pursue the task of economic development in the context of an ideological orientation which essentially accepts the developmental precepts of the metropolitan bourgeoisie', making of this ideology a hegemonic one. This bias was situated at the very core of the ideology that defined the development obstacles and the means of overcoming them. The obstacle advanced by this ideological orientation were the low levels of savings, limited achievement motivation, low propensity to invest, low productivity, inadequate technology, low wages, regional disparities, and inadequate manpower. As a status quo oriented ideology it served to conceal class distinctions by arguing that class structure and class struggle are irrelevant to the process of development and that there is no need to transform class relations. Such an ideology also serves to legitimise dependency by conceptualising 'development essentially as a process of becoming more like the bourgeois countries' (ibid.:67). In so doing economic dependence is presented as inevitable and thus no cause for alarm. The ideology also excuses the painfully slow pace of economic development in Africa characterised by a conservative thrust and the presentation of the development process as only possible through 'slow incremental change' (ibid.:68). The acceptance of this approach, he argues, would lead to the perpetuation of underdevelopment. Misconstruing and distorting problems, this ideology inhibited the solutions. It also masked the link between development and revolution. He therefore concluded that:

> Any approach, which makes the achievement of development in Africa compatible with the maintenance of the present exploitative relations of production and with the links to imperialism, can only hinder Africa (ibid.:69). Another major impediment to development is what Ake calls depoliticisation, or 'reducing the effective participation of the masses and non-hegemonic factions of the ruling class, and preventing some interests and points of view from finding political expression' (ibid.:78). The process reduces 'the prospect of overcoming underdevelopment by facilitating the ascending of elements of the ruling class associated with the coercive machinery of the state' (ibid.:79).

The disenchantment with modernisation theory led to a shift towards underdevelopment and structural dependency theory. This was both out of scepticism and of hostility to the dominant centre, and it encouraged the model of development proposed by Amin under the label of 'delinking', a theory of development advocating autonomous development out of the scope of the dominant world system. Samir Amin's analysis focused attention on the critique of the world system based on capitalist exploitation and inequality between nations (Amin 1974), a process he captured in the term 'polarisation' (1993; 2000a). This polarisation is presented as 'immanent to the global expansion of capital' (2000a:602). His analysis leads him to the conclusion that capitalism is fraught with three internal contradictions, namely commodity alienation (analysed in its incipient stages by Marx and Engels); global polarisation between nation-states and within segments of populations; within the nation-state and the destruction of the natural resource base of the planet, that is, ecological destruction (1993, 2000a:619, 1998:155-156, 2002b:340). Commodity or economic alienation is characterised by labour subordination as dictated by the rule of profit as against labour interests. Ecological destruction refers to the opposition between principles of economic calculation, which support a short-term vision, on the one hand, and the imperative of saving the future of the planet, that is, the inability of this economic rationality to take into account the fact that there are limits to the exploitation of the earth's resources. Polarisation points to the growing contrast between opulent centres and miserable peripheries, this situation being exacerbated by five monopolies that define the current phase of capitalism, considered by Amin as the third phase (2000a:618), and referred to as globalisation in neoliberal terminology. This third phase is marked by the 'on-going scientific and technological revolution, computerization and robotics, decentralization of productive systems (delocalised production managed from a distance, sub-contracting, etc), tertiarization and quarterization of economic life and the decline of the share of industrial manufacturing' (2000a:618).

According to Amin (1993, 1994a:7, 1994b:21, 1996, 1998:137-138, 2000a, 2000b:5), the monopolies exercised by the capitalist centre are the control of the global financial system, control over science and technology, control over the management of natural resources, exclusive control over media instruments for the manipulation of the world's population, and monopoly over refined and state-of-the-art arms or weapons of mass destruction. The monopolies define the 'framework within which the law of value expresses itself' (2000b:5) and produce a hierarchy in the distribution of income on a world scale. While the law of value in the strict sense of the word would require that remuneration for work be at the same level for the same level of productivity, the globalised law of value dictates unequal remuneration for the same productivity level while the prices of goods tend to be the same world-wide (2002b:340).

These monopolies are also at the basis of distortions of a social, economic, cultural and political nature (1996). Economic distortions are characterised by growing inequality in the distribution of income at both the national and global level and the detachment of financial from productive activity and its constitution into an independent autonomous sphere (a process Amin calls 'financiarization') leading to a situation where a productive sector, operating on the basis of investments, exists side-by-side with an unused capital surplus. At the political level the distortions are reflected in the contradiction between the 'economic law of capitalism and globalization and the emancipatory democratic aspirations of the popular classes and nations victimized by capitalism', a situation that is 'increasingly barbarous' (2000a:621). There are also contradictions between 'markets and democracy and between liberal economic globalization and political-cultural universalism' (2003a). Distortions of a social and political nature are all derivatives of the economic distortions and constitute, according to Amin, 'the most serious obstacles to any project of sustainable development' (1996).

As concerns the periphery and Africa in particular, unequal development of the system leads to the emergence of two segments: an industrialised segment, which resembles a 'gigantic subcontracting enterprise controlled by countries of the centre and operating through the five monopolies', thus constituting the real periphery of the system or Third World; and another segment which faces the prospect of further marginalisation within the world system (1994a:21). The latter segment, which includes Africa, can be termed the Fourth World and belongs to the 'marginalized periphery' of the next generation (1994a:7). Amin holds that one of the most important consequences of globalisation is the creation of a labour reserve in the periphery. Faced with the drive to globalisation, the marginalised peripheries have no strategy or project of their own as the imperialist circles think and take the initiatives for them, they being merely 'passive subjects of globalization' (2000b:5).

In fact, the concepts of self-reliant development and African socialism fashionable in the decades following independence were actually meant to be self-supporting development paradigms following the direction charted by the delinking school. The mood of development thinking in the 1980s further shifted into one of despair with the series of crises that befell the continent, namely the Sahel drought, the food crises, generalised economic regression and the debt crisis. These crises caused not only the questioning of the feasibility of these models but also awakened Africans to their development problematic: how and by whom is development to take place in Africa?

The fluctuations in conceptual frameworks in African development thinking coincided almost totally with predominant modes of conceptualisation at the centre of the world system both in chronological succession and in nature. Development thinking in Africa has thus survived mostly as an intellectual colony of the centre of the system and has been dominated by economism, the rural-

urban dichotomy (and the resultant relations of domination), and the external orientation of development. In the face of these pervading but frail approaches to development, alternative modes of conceptual analysis are constantly being proposed. In their practical content, they advocate a comprehensive societal approach to development while in their theoretical aspects they argue for a certain multi-disciplinary approach.

Calls for a revision of the development paradigm have, however, not often led to operational value, as the collapse of the former Soviet bloc has witnessed a triumphalist return to an unbridled neo-liberalism. It is in this context that we talk of post-developmentalism, defined as the discourses and practices related to development with a tendency towards their replacement (Yenshu Vubo and Fonchingong 2002). The calls and even the pressure for adjustment have been paving the way for a globalisation of a market economy presented as inevitable. It is also instructive to note that the development crisis has been accompanied by calls for the reorientation of conceptualisation and practice.

The question of alternatives has attracted attention in intellectual circles both in the centre of the current world hegemonic system and in the South (cf. Amin 1993, 1994 a & b, 1996, 1998 a, b, c & d, 2000 a, b & c, 2001 a & b, 2002 a & b, 2003, Houtart 1998, 2000, 2002, Mestrum 2002, Ekeh op cit., Van Nieuwenhuize 1983, Ake 1978, 1992, 1996, 1998, 2000) with the following convergence points. First, there is unanimity about the fact that the dominant model of development is a failure in terms of its content or orientation, operation (economism) and its actors, and that there is a need to transcend this model. It is in this regard that we can talk of an imperative of transcendence. While some critics limit their work to an academic discourse that would lamely call for the inclusion of certain parameters such as culture, environment and the social side of development, a more realistic view is careful to point out where the entry points are. Faced with the gigantic nature of the task at hand, the anti-globalisation school has even proposed a series of steps in the transcendence process, some short-term, some medium-term and some situated at the level of utopia. Second, there is a convergence of views about the need for alternatives that abandon the path of 'catching-up', whose latest disguised version, sponsored from the centre, is a diagnosis in terms of marginalisation and proposals in terms of adjustment to global conditions and internal measures which align with the neo-liberal gospel. That is why the imperative of transcendence may take the form of the search for indigenous pathways to development, the stress on the concept of autonomy (individual, communal, state) or the utopia of delinking, all operating at different levels. In this case, the imperative of transcendence is nurtured by the distortions of the current world-system or the shortcomings of the model of development that it has inspired as well as by the world time of development (Ekeh op cit.) and the constraints that it generates.

The crucial and central question that has not been adequately answered is that of actors or agents. Although the current state system has attracted a severe criti-

que for its multiple flaws, no credible alternative seems to have emerged. Such a situation seems to be beneficial to the current neo-liberal attempts to construct a New World Order based on the dictates of the Market and Capital that animates it. Calls for a reform of the state in its present form and the elaboration of regional groupings outside the scope of the current order are lame, as the question of flag bearers still remains unanswered. Who will reform these states or will be the basis of radical regional blocs? An obvious answer will be a radical leadership responsive to the needs of local peoples. Although there are examples of such leaders who have emerged out of civil society (especially the labour movement), there is little in the literature about their performance as standard bearers of alternative projects. Moreover the mere mention of civil society is not enough to give assurance about credible alternatives. As has been underscored by many scholars, civil society could equally be a tool in the hands of the controllers of the current system, serving as it were as an instrument of systems maintenance (Houtart 1998; Founou-Tchuigoua and Kasanda 2002). It is in this regard that there is a need to undertake an in-depth analysis of the role of civil society in the search for alternatives, while highlighting its relation vis-à-vis the state and its relation to powerful radical forces world-wide. Alternatives cannot only come from a civil society evolving in a parallel manner to and as a marginal movement within the state system. This civil society must be in a position to effect political change or cooperate with radical political forces in the process of transforming existing conditions irrespective of the level at which such transformations are taking place. This analysis would inspire the current endeavour of research into the role the civil society has played in the search for alternatives as concerns the content of development practice, the organisation and structure of action and the actors.

The Promise of the Budding Civil Society

The Multiple Meanings of Civil Society

The concept of civil society has become a new fad, but is seems not to have the same meanings for everyone. Tostensen, Tvedten and Vaa (2001:11) remark that this concept is 'diverse and lacking in clarity. A multitude of terms is being used interchangeably and inconsistently, often without precise definition'. Since the term has become so prominent and fashionable, it has come to mean different things to different people: scholars, politicians and activists. As a result, definitions of civil society often reflect the function one set of actors intends it to perform (Bahmueller 1997). The principal bones of contention over the definition of civil society include whether the term should be primarily a normative or non-normative tool of social science, and whether we should consider the economic and religious and even the family as part of it. Michael Walzer defines civil society as 'the space of [politically] uncoerced human association and also the set of relational

networks formed for the sake of family, faith, interest, and ideology that fill this space' (1990:293). It is not clear whether 'interest' in this definition includes economic interest. Jean Cohen and Andrew Arato explicitly eliminate the economic sphere from their 'working definition' of civil society as they limit it to 'a sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movement and forms of public communication' (1992:ix). In a similar vein, Narsoo (1991) argued that the concept of civil society is a contested terrain, insofar as the exact extent and limit of state intervention as against the integrity of civil society activity remains an open question. Civil society has been referred to as all that constitutes social relations, organisations and institutions that stand outside the state structures. Therefore the term 'organs' of civil society is often used with reference to these groups.

By contrast, Shils (1991:3) sees civil society as:

> ... composed of three parts. One is a 'complex of autonomous institutions' including economic ones, distinguishable from family, clan, locality, or state; a second is a portion of society that possesses 'a particular complex of relationships between itself and the state and a distinctive set of institutions which safeguard the separation of state and civil society and maintain effective ties between them'; and the third is a 'widespread pattern of refined or civil manners'.

Hefner, for his part, maintains that civil society is the arena of voluntary associations, including 'business associations' that extend 'beyond the household but outside the state' (Hefner 1998:6). While he confines local economic relationships to the civil society arena, he excludes large-scale, especially multinational corporations, as incompatible with the emergence of loyalty that face-to-face associations are capable of generating. Janoski applies an astute analytic hand in dividing the polity into state, public, private and market spheres, locating civil society as a sphere of public discourse among these four elements (Janoski 1998:13).

Offering a somewhat different interpretation of the term civil society, Salamon and Anheier (1997) restrict it to formally constituted 'non-profit' organisations. They describe these organisations as a significant economic 'sector' that contributes large-scale employment opportunities and expenditures to their respective national economies. They omit the family and highlight certain economic features of civil society. Benjamin Barber considers civil society as 'civic space' that 'occupies the middle ground between government and the private sector' (Barber 1996:27) and is distinctive in that it makes no claim to exercise a monopoly of legitimate coercion. Rather, work here is voluntary and, in this sense, inhabits a 'private' realm devoted to the cooperative domain and as such civil society shares with the private sector the trend towards the promotion of liberty: it is voluntary and it is constituted by freely associated individuals and groups. However, unlike the private sector, it is aimed at a common ground and at consensual (that is integrative and collaborative) modes of action. This idea contradicts Hegel's ground breaking

concept of civil society as a competitive arena encompassing economic and other forms of social life lying between family and the state. In this view, followed by Marx and his adherents, civil society is a quasi-disorderly social realm where, among other things, the struggle for economic existence takes place. For Hegel, because civil society limits the forces inclining people to cooperate, the state must harmonise competing interests.

More recent definitions of civil society need to be considered in relation to the donor and so-called international development communities. Firstly, donors have had shifting perceptions of civil society. The main reason for donors to shift towards civil society was the increasing 'disillusionment on the side of the state as both the agent of economic development and locus of justice' (Howell 2002:118). These political assaults upon the state took place within the ideological context of neo-liberalism, which celebrated the allocative efficiencies of the market and derided the state as an agency for economic growth and management. Just like the arguments already mentioned, donor conceptions of civil society are also marked by complexity, especially in terms of a typology of civil society. By the late 1980s most bilateral donors channelled some of their funding principally through NGOs, regarding them in general as legitimate partners in development (Howell 2002:118).

The difficulty in situating civil society is illustrated in the way it was treated and integrated in its organisational structure. For instance donors tended to reduce civil society to NGOs. Howell remarks that 'from the mid 1990s onwards NGO units metamorphosed into civil society departments and donors sprouted civil society projects, civil society officers, civil society experts and civil society challenge funds' (ibid.:2002:119). While these are but a few of the formulations of the concepts of civil society, most of them illustrate the commonalities shared by nearly all definitions of the term.

Tostensen, Tvedten and Vaa (op cit.) identify some of the current multiple meanings associated with the concept of civil society. The first of these concepts considers civil society as the 'carrier of positive values' or the 'good society' (p. 12). A second regards it as the 'sum of organizations and activities that contribute to the civility of public life in one from or another'. A normative element is generally present, which includes the multiple functions Diamond (1994:11) attributes to civil society in the democratic dispensation (see also Barber, 1996). The third sees 'civil society as a sphere, a space or an arena for action by divergent interests, struggling against each other or against the state, or simple engaging in self-contained activities of various kinds', a view akin to Houtart's conception of civil society as the arena for social struggles (Houtart op cit.). A fourth connotation presents civil society 'as a specific product of historical and cultural conditions' (p. 12), while a fifth conception presents 'civil society as essentially an anti-hegemonic project against modern liberalism and capitalism... one strain puts the accent on the alternative visions of society, through quasi-clandestine forms that

seek to dissociate from society considered to have derailed' (very much in line with Amin's vision of actors in the search for alternative) '[while another]... places civil society in direct opposition to a centralized or autocratic state as a countervailing power' (p. 13). This view is in reaction to the state's 'abysmal performance' in both development and democracy, necessitating as it were a need to roll back the state. This is the view held by the donor community.

They then consider the prevailing definitions based on the perception of civil society as a 'virtuous stereotype', a view which reflects 'wishful thinking on the part of the donor community, a favourable self-projection by sections of the civil society itself, or an ideologically tainted representation of segments of the academic community' (p. 13). After a critical analysis of these conceptions, they then propose a balanced definition which considers '[c]ivil society as the public realm of organized social activities located between the state and private household (on family) – regardless of normative orientation' (p. 13). They agree with the fact that civil society is the '... arena of diverse activity, some but by no means all of which [is] counterpoised to the state. Much associational life may be neutral vis-à-vis the state' (pp. 13-14).

This capacious concept of civil society – the whole range of civic action independent of formal political institutions – includes service associations, philanthropic groups, cultural groups, religious organisations, labour unions, athletic organisations, and youth groups, academia, the media, plus many more in every imaginable field of interest or endeavour. The concept also embraces economic relations, organisations, and activities not owned or directly controlled by the state.

The Historical Evolution of the Concept

In order to understand the dynamics related to the different meanings associated with the concept of civil society it is important to attempt a historical description of the analysis of the concept. We will base our reflections on contemporary scholars such as Houtart (1998), Tejada (1998), Santa Ana (1998) and Gallardo (1998), who are more or less agreed on the itinerary this concept has taken since the Enlightenment. As such it is generally agreed that civil society is a product of modernity with its roots traceable to the enlightenment social philosophers (Locke, Hobbes) who posited a dichotomy between a natural or savage or inferior society, and civil society, corresponding to the opposition between the state of nature and the state of civilisation. Rousseau and Hegel go further to make a distinction between three levels, natural society, civil society and political society. In this regard, civil society depends on political society. In these formulations civil society more or less takes the connotation of civilisation, a lawful society regulated by a government in contractual relations with citizens (the regulatory organ of so-called civilised society) in opposition to a state of lawlessness (natural or savage society). The concept of civil society thus limits itself to the part of the world considered as civilised and the rest of humanity considered as living in a state of

nature. Marx and Engels offered a more restricted definition with the development of capitalist social relations, and define civil society as the set of social relations of the bourgeois society, making the two terms synonymous. It thus gives a class connotation to the term and even makes it a multi-class concept. Dogmatic Marxism even restricts this term to the set of economic relations of bourgeois society in opposition to the political society or set of regulatory institutions.

It is Gramsci who offered perhaps the most elaborate articulation of the concept. To him civil society is part of the superstructure in opposition to the structure or economic structure (what is referred to in classical Marxist thought as the 'base'). Civil society is understood here as the sphere of socially institutionalised action through which a social class achieves control or hegemony over other classes. Gramsci defines civil society therefore as 'l'ensemble des organismes vulgairement appelés privés... et qui correspondent à la fonction d'hégémonie que le groupe dominant exerce sur l'ensemble de la société' (in Tejada op cit.:29). In an attempt to clarify the Gramscian contribution to an understanding of the concept, Jose de Santa Ana (op cit) distinguishes five key concepts which, when articulated, bring out very clearly a full understanding of civil society. The first of these is the structure or the context in which economic interests are articulated, while the state corresponds to the set of organs through which the leadership class exercises hegemony and coercion over subordinate classes. Hegemony refers not only to the direction of preserving, defending and consolidating politico-economic interests but also the objective of elaborating educative strategies so as to obtain the consent of these subordinate classes in a manner that presents the interest of the dominant class as universally unchallengeable values. In this framework the civil society is the sphere within which individuals can associate with each other outside the scope of the economic structure and the state - i.e. the political structure (Santa Ana ibid.:42).

Santa Ana (ibid.:62) indicates that these organisations oscillate permanently between co-option by and resistance to the state, and function in an ambiguous situation where adaptation and resistance co-exist. This is because, in its hegemonic drive, the state tries to enlist or co-opt some of these organisations and transform them to serve the function of ideological legitimacy. This leads us to the concept of hegemony.

Hegemony, as we saw above, refers to the elaboration of educative strategies as a way of obtaining the social consensus of the dominant ideology (Santa Ana ibid.:64). In this process there is resistance from anti-hegemonic movements in the style of what Gramsci referred to as the hegemonic struggle, a real critique of common sense philosophies generated by the hegemonic drive of dominant classes and a certain type of education at popular level. To succeed in creating hegemony in society is to create the conditions for a cultural and moral orientation of society. Santa Ana therefore concludes by saying that there is a need to

respect the autonomy of processes characteristic of civil society, since the potential thrust for social transformation is situated within it.

Houtart (op cit.), for his part, indicates that Gramsci does not take civil society to mean the space of organisations working independent of the state and the economy (most currently captured in the concept of the market), but the structuring of social relations through associations and cultural institutions. Civil society has relative autonomy vis-à-vis the state and the market because it is made up of organisations and actions which either facilitate the hegemonic practices of the ruling classes ('classes dirigeantes') or provide marginalised and exploited groups with the space to confront political institutions and the market with their claims and grievances. Houtart therefore concludes that civil society is the arena for social struggles, and the differentials observed in the meanings that the term takes are symptomatic of the ideological differences surrounding the concept. Gallardo (1998) proposes other conceptual refinements to the concept, such as the opposition between civil and military society, lay (and hence civil) and religious society, civil or urban and countryside, private (individual) and public, and lastly current vulgar distinctions between civil society and the state, a distinction which has its origins in the Marxist discussions on the concept. The last connotation associated with the concept owes much to the current context of globalisation that transforms the meanings associated with the concept (Vilas 1998, Tejada op cit., Houtart op cit.).

Tejada (op cit.) has indicated that the context of globalisation in which civil society has witnessed a new lease of life is characterised amongst others by polarisation (see also Amin 1998, 2000), exclusion from the formal economy, the intensification of real and relative poverty, the increase in migratory trends, and a precarious situation in employment. He describes this situation as one in which classical social forces (the labour movement, political parties of the left) have succumbed to a pitiless capitalist transition and where the world is divided into spheres of influence with international political and economic organisations becoming increasingly used as instruments of the northern countries in their domination over countries of the south, legitimising in a way the capitalist project at international level.

Santa Ana (op cit.:46-49) has also highlighted the rise in individualism as reflected in individual behaviour and practices in the dominant ideological precepts and in popular literature and folklore. There is therefore a tension between the process of globalisation, which imposes itself, and different and essentially new resistance movements that contradict the system (Santa Ana ibid.:55, Vilas op cit.:70). Although there are systemic movements that finally get entrapped in the system's hegemonic drive (for example, nationalist movements, labour, the great social movement of the nineteenth century), anti-systemic movements are at the heart of the most protracted social conflicts (human rights defence movements, feminist movements, movements fighting for the rights of oppressed ethnic and cultural groups, ecological movements and certain religious movements. Although the

short-term outcome of this confrontation is favourable to the system, the long-term gains are a modification of the system under pressure from popular anti-systemic forces (Santa Ana op cit.).

It is in this regard that Vilas (op cit.:76-78) considers civil society as mostly an affair of the poor and an expression of the popular dimension of social dynamics. This leads him to think that the term corresponds to or tends to replace what used to be referred to as the 'People'. Vilas (ibid.:69) also remarks that the most important element in the revival of interest in civil society is the resort to the identity dimension of collective action.

This arena for popular manifestation, according to Vilas, is now more varied and more complex than it was four decades ago, as the context of globalisation has transformed it. In a similar vein, Gallardo (op cit.:93-97) describes this civil society as: the arena of economic, social, ideological and cultural conflicts that the state has to resolve – either by stepping in or by suppressing them; the base from which demands are made on the state; the arena for different forms of activism, mobilisation, associational life and the organisation of actors and social movements who do not directly wish to control power. It becomes in this context the domain of relations between individuals, groups and classes whose existence is independent of state institutions as well as the space for the popular exercise of de facto power in opposition to the political structure that is constantly in search of legitimacy. Treating civil society as a third sector, Gallardo (op cit.:97) thinks that it has the potential of serving as the arena in which social movements and actors can contest political legitimacy and engender new forms of legitimacy or even a new civic culture.

Moving in a similar direction, Houtart (op cit.:13-19), proposes a typology of civil society made up of three dimensions that abound in the current context but which are the products of the historical situation: a non-analytical or angelic vision, a pre-analytic bourgeois connotation, and a popular analytic conception. The non-analytical angelic vision considers civil society as the whole set of organisations or initiatives undertaken by all types of groups which constitute a third sector alongside the state. This sector is perceived as the playground of anti-state, interclass, utopian ideologies, which, although hoping to change the society, end up achieving very little. The bourgeois conception of civil society is one of a world of free enterprise and all that contributes to economic growth. This is the scope of the ideological apparatus of the state in the sense Gramsci would give the term: the school, health, mass communication institutions, cultural and religious organisations, professional organisations and, indeed, every other institution that operates in the direction of reproducing the social relations of the market. Voluntary associations are often added to this category as proof of the creativity of citizens or those organisations that are often co-opted in the direction of the dominant hegemonic drive and are subordinated to the market, which is presented as a natural structure (see also Santa Ana op cit.). Instead of being a third sector as is

presented by the non-analytical vision, this pre-analytical bourgeois conception treats civil society as a simple third hand situated between the invisible hand of the economy and the visible regulatory hand of the state. The pre-analytical conception is non-critical in its presentation of the current order as untouchable, that is, it cannot be reformed. It is in this regard that Houtart treats this conception as situated within the perspective of the current ideology of a world without an alternative.

The analytical or critical perspective starts from the observation that the market – unequal class relations – determines civil society in its present connotation. Its heuristic value is that it enables one to see the civil society as multidimensional, comprising, according to Houtart, four dimensions:

- Institutions produced by social actors who monopolise rights and privileges because of their position in the economic field;
- Institutions produced by the popular classes, which the dominant classes co-opt depending on their interests and hegemonic designs;
- Social and cultural resistance movements, emptied of any vitality by way of fragmentation as well as atomistic, and hence harmless, struggles often tolerated or ignored by the system;
- Resistance movements searching for alternatives. In this category one would find not only the traditional categories of the proletariat and organic intellectuals but also social movements supported by other intellectuals in the process of articulating popular interests in a comprehensive manner.

In this regard, civil society is defined as the space for social struggles, resistance and the articulation of alternatives. It is the arena for the organisation of popular movements in their quest for the democratisation of society and the building of new economic, social and political relations, which imply confronting the state. The struggles of the popular classes for a place within the civil society is presented as nothing else than the expression of a social struggle for justice and the transformation of social relations.

Civil Society in the African Context

For the past almost two decades, civil society and especially the association spirit has emerged as a force within the African milieu, constituting as it were a massive collective fact of contemporary Africa that cannot be overlooked or underestimated (Jacob and Lavigne-Delville 1994). In fact, it has a life cycle of growth, blossoming and disappearance. Jacob and Lavigne-Delville (ibid.) argue that it is both the product of change and a catalyst of change itself, and demonstrate a link between the organisational effervescence characteristic of the emergence of civil society, on the one hand, and the social and political restructuring of the African rural world, on the other. They therefore proceed to wonder whether they cannot form the basis of local development. Founou-Tchuigoua

and Kassanda (2002) identify four important components of what would constitute civil society and social movements in sub-Saharan African: civil society organisations (CSOs), trade unions, women's organisations, and the student and peasant movement. They argue that civil society in this context takes the connotation of associations with a non-political and non-ideological content, excluding in this regard all forms of expression and organisation through which the popular classes struggle towards transforming social relations. Such a conception, they posit, reduces civil society to a set of harmless and powerless associations that exclude from their agenda the task of transforming the world in the direction of adjusting to the demands of the dominant self-perpetuating system. The main actors in this regard are NGOs, who are providers of amenities for the so-called 'fight against poverty', development orientated associations and human rights defence activists. They indicate that their weak financial capacity exposes them to both a financial and ideological dependency vis-à-vis donor agencies. One can also add that very often NGOs or third sector activities operate as an underground economy and the source of embourgeoisement for their local promoters (Yenshu Vubo 1998b), even if there is a fall-out in terms of predominantly service jobs for a few employees. Founou-Tchuigoua and Kasanda (op cit.) also point out that both local governments and donor organisations and governments alike are concerned with ridding civil society organisations of any political substance and role that they are likely to play.

They also trace the history of the trade unions, and student and peasant movements back to the colonial period when they were closely associated with the nationalist struggle for independence. They observe that these three movements follow an identical itinerary as they were quickly associated to and later became adjuncts of the structure of political monolithism of the post-independence era, either through repression or peaceful acquiescence. All movements are reported to have benefited only from the spate of political liberalisation of the 1990s, as they could once more recover their vibrant nature. Special mention is made of the South African workers' movement as an active force at the forefront of the struggles that led to the transition to majority rule in that country (Founou-Tchuigoua and Kasanda ibid.:131-133). The student union, for its part, has come to face new challenges, namely globalisation, ecology, equity, population movements, brain drain and the reform of the school system. The balance sheet of the peasant movement is one of a movement suffering from state authoritarianism, the burden of financial constraints, and warped legislation with regard to the land. Even the new lease of life of the 1990s was only instrumental in projecting the peasant movement within a context of neo-liberal adjustment. As such, this movement is passing through a critical period in its history where factors such as population movements, civil wars, political manipulation, discrimination and the poor education of the leadership are unfavourable to its development as a force capable of making alternative proposal in coping with current challenges.

The women's movement is presented as one characterised by a proliferation of organisations working towards improving women's condition within a variety of ideological or programmatic frames: women in development (WID), anti-poverty, efficiency and empowerment. Beyond these, women are also involved in various forms of activism of either a spontaneous and circumstantial nature or of a systemic nature, with long-term implications. In the first case, Founou-Tchuigoua and Kasanda (ibid.) affirm that women have always been at the forefront of popular protest, although such action did not either target political structures or aim at a radical structural transformation of society. This would explain the phase of demobilisation that soon set in. The second case is made up of organisations which are involved in designing strategies towards a long-term transformation of society in the direction of gender equity and equality. The authors identify the neo-liberal reforms of the Washington Consensus, religious traditions and customs, and dependency vis-à-vis the state and international organisations, as major constraints to this movement. They argue that one cannot conceptualise Africa's development without the women's movement (Founou-Tchuigoua and Kasanda ibid.:137). Finally they conclude that there is an imbalance between forces, which is unfavo)urable to radical social movements and results in a critical situation which is not hopeless but calls for new reflections on the strategies and the bases of struggle.

Other analyses of the civil society in Africa are equally critical and argue for giving an Africanist tinge to the varying definitions. Osaghae (1998b) analyses the dislocating effects of Structural Adjustment Programmes on national cohesion and regrets that the civil society has not been called into the search for solutions to the question of national cohesion. Political liberalisation and economic adjustment are presented as propelling 'contradictory forces... a conjunction of both processes [being] mutually destructive' (ibid.:6). He argues that 'although a reformed state, better governance and democratization are germane to the World Bank's concern with civil society, they are secondary to its pre-occupation with economic growth and development' (ibid.:8). He indicates that 'the point is forgotten that civil society functions as the engine room or theatre of national cohesion, the place where contesting and opposing forces (which tend to increase under adjustment) are played out and resolved' (ibid.). Concerning civil society itself he points out that the concept should not be restricted to its Western meanings, but that 'the process, structures and functions it entails are to be found everywhere there is a public realm and/or state' (ibid.:9). This implies that there was a civil society in pre-colonial or indigenous African society as in the colonial and post-colonial period. He then situates civil society in 'contradistinction to the state, as both of them occupy the public realm' (ibid.:13). Three notions therefore emerge from the widespread usages with which the concept has come to be associated: it is essentially a 'non-state space of the public realm' with the function of defending 'society against the intrusions of the state' (ibid.); it is a repository of 'common good,

collective will and solidarity as well as public opinion, and acting on these bases, civil society sets the rules governing the functioning of the state and its operators' (ibid.:14); and it is not homogeneous, that is, it is the arena of contending social forces which are competing for 'dominance'(ibid.). It is not synonymous with associational life because not all associations qualify to be included under the umbrella of civil society. In fact, only those associations which are self conscious of opposition to the state need to be included in this category (ibid.:15). It would, however, be useful to include ethnic and other primary associations which are part of what Osaghae calls 'positive ethnicity', as they 'command the loyalties of the vast majority of the ordinary peoples from civil society' (ibid.:16). Osaghae also proposes that this concept be seen as a process rather than as mere structures (ibid.:17). In his comprehensive definition Osaghae includes formal and informal organisations as well as social movements. Elsewhere he also argues that the civil society has to play an important role in restructuring state-society relations in a context where such relations have been distorted by the alienating practices of the colonial and post-colonial state (Osaghae 1998b).

An analysis of the state's relation to civil society shows the monolithic one-party state as totalising and attempting to achieve unrestricted domination over civil society by claiming a monopoly of the public realm. In the period marked by democratisation in the 1990s, the emergence of civil society elements of various shades led to a confrontation between some of these elements and the state which was largely responsible for opening up public space. These groups did not only seek to articulate the interests of particular segments of society, they were particularly critical of SAPs which were responsible for both deteriorating social conditions and their dislocating effect on the common man. Working on the premise that civil society is an arena wherein social conflicts at the national level can be resolved, Osaghae argues that civil society has to be given greater attention in terms of its political functions and the influence of adjustment, if national cohesion has to be given the place it deserves on the adjustment agenda (pp. 30-31).

According to Mercer, although non-governmental organisations have come to be considered within the New Policy Agenda of Development as the panacea, they may be unable to live up to the hopes that have been placed on them. She argues that 'the nature of state-society relations as played out between governments and NGOs must be seen as a central issue' (Mercer 1999:248). She goes on to show that, in the case of Tanzania, the state's attitude has been characterised by an ambivalence which treats 'NGOs as an unknown quantity, yet they are a resource that needs to be brought under control... government is well aware of the contribution that NGOs can make to "civil society", and the government's policy is laced with references to this virtue of NGOs. Despite such rhetoric of participation, however, it is evident that the government's overarching objective is to co-opt the NGO sector in social service provision' (ibid.:251). She points to an increasing attempt by the state to control and regulate the NGO sector, but

masked by the 'language of participation and empowering development', which replaces the state control model of the 1960s and 1970s which had been 'facilitated overtly by the rigidity of the authoritarian state structures, and covertly by the Ujamaa language of self-help and modernization' (ibid.:252.) She also points to differential levels of participation in NGO activities among local peoples, demonstrating that participation has been restricted to 'middle-income families' (ibid.:254) with the richer categories showing little interest while the poor are simply excluded. The conclusion is that the space that has been offered by liberalisation has not resulted in greater participation for the poor. It has rather resulted in a 'new mechanism for the reproduction of inequality' (ibid.:255) and the exclusion of the poor.

Cameron argues that the failure of pastoralist NGOs in Tanzania was due to their inability to address themselves to wider political agenda closely related to their own programmes - the land question and socio-economic development. His article claims that these NGOs were doomed to failure from inception, 'given the broader force at play' (Cameron 2001:57). He argues that although 'democratization has opened up new spaces for civil organizing, embracing free market economics poses dangers to all Tanzanian communities' (ibid.:67). Cameron also points to the 'over- determining influence' of donors (see also Mohan) in the short history of a Tanzanian federation of NGOs.

Hearn (2001) argues that the current vision of civil society in Africa serves to stabilise rather than challenge 'the social and political status quo'. In a study in three African countries (South Africa, Ghana and Uganda), she shows that there are limits to the concept of partnership that is central to the usage associated with civil society, because it 'erodes the potential for civil society organizations to fundamentally challenge the status quo' (Hearn ibid.:52). In the case of Ghana, Hearn demonstrates how CSOs were used to facilitate rather than question market-driven reforms, while in South Africa they were the handmaiden for diverting attention from 'socialist, redistributionist paradigms aimed at directly redressing the gross material inequality left by apartheid' (ibid.:48) towards a liberal democratic form ('procedural democracy') (ibid.:49) in the manner which Samir Amin calls 'low-intensity democracy'. In the process, the concept of democracy was redefined and the new regime's control was enhanced over the 'same intensely exploitative economic system, but this time without heavily mobilized opposition [as in the anti-apartheid campaign period]... It has ensured that democracy in the new South Africa is not about reconstructing the social order but about effective system maintenance' (ibid.).

Mohan (2002) reveals the tensions that exist between northern NGOs and local partners, the tendency for local NGOs to create fiefdoms in their area of operation, and the propensity for NGO officials to exploit their organisations for personal benefit. He concludes that the third sector facilitates the neo-liberal agenda that leads to a factionalism that undermines development itself. It 'covertly

promotes social divisions, promotes factionalism and marginalizes some groups' (see also Mercer op cit.). He also indicates that 'the current paradigm is based on a particular vision which sees civil society as an autonomous realm of associational life in which "interests" can be pursued collectively' (p.128). He then advances five points for an analytical understanding of civil society. He sees it as an entity constituted across local, national, and international boundaries. Second, it is not an unproblematic entity between state and family but is 'shaped by economic forces'. Third, there is a need to examine the 'shifting processes of rule operating in the "hybrid" interstices' between state and society. Fourth, generalisations about CSOs should be avoided given their varied nature. Finally, there is a need to interpret the CSO in Africa 'through locally relevant cultural norms and practices' (p.135) as Osaghae has proposed (op cit.). He reveals that some of the disappointments of civil society, as exemplified in the study of northern Ghana, are the external determination of the local agenda by foreign NGOs, the tendency to use NGOs in enforcing neo-liberal economic programmes where they should have acted as watchdogs (see also Hearn op cit), the tendency for local NGOs to exploit local culture as a defence mechanism against the external control of the agenda, the erosion of local autonomy with the external determination of agenda, the tendency for the state to control funding through the state via state-centred legislation, and the tendency for local elites to use NGOs for private ends. In addition, legislation may selectively favour one type of NGO over another (p.148; see also Temngah in this volume). Although there is no synergy between 'state and civil society... in more subtle ways the state and NGOs are mutually implicated' (ibid.:149; see also Mercer op cit.).

He demonstrates that, in the main, NGO activities, as with those of civil society, are generally an adjunct and an underside to the neo-liberal framework, working more as a facilitator than as a constructive agent with an autonomous agenda. The political implications are a new form of imperialism and an attempt to use civil society as an 'element in the struggle to contain the Third World and police its policies' (ibid.:150). There is therefore a need to 'link' participatory approaches to the wider, more difficult, processes of democratisation, anti-imperialism and feminism in order to achieve 'long-term changes' (ibid.:151, see also Founou-Tchigoua and Kasanda op cit.).

Civil Society in Cameroon: Towards a Situational Analysis

Social movements of the civil society have blossomed alongside or in consonance with the movement for democratic reform. The term 'civil society' became part of official discourses as early as 1991 with the so called Tripartite Talks that were convened by the regime to seek solutions to the crisis generated by the transition to democratic rule in Cameroon. The regime convened a meeting bringing together public authorities ('pouvoirs publics'), political parties, and civil society. While the opposition parties thought the political future of the country

was an issue to be negotiated between only two parties in a long drawn-out confrontation – government and opposition – they were surprised to see a third actor, civil society. From the look of things the regime was enlarging the spectrum of political debate and action. However, by so doing they were also diluting the voices of protest by designating a chosen civil society. It seemed like the regime was recognising the civil society occasioned by the liberation of public space with the enactment of the liberty laws of December 1990. But this was not the case because the choice was arbitrary, and those representing civil society were carefully chosen to avoid troublesome elements where voices were identical with those of the opposition parties. This selective attitude was not only going to be representative of the regime's attitude towards the budding civil society, but the cleavage within the political class between opposition and regime became a constant feature of a dichotomy within civil society. This was all the more so as some associations had allied themselves to the platform known as the National Coordination of Opposition Parties and Associations, which avowedly had the same goals. This selective attitude had the effect of also essentially limiting the field of civil society to officially approved voices. In such a way, the regime either refused to grant recognition to associational forms suspected of harbouring hostile attitudes towards the state, or enacted legislative instruments that confined civil society organisations to benign forms of activity (law of association, law on religious organisation, law on non-governmental organisations, law on common initiative groups, law on economic initiative groups, law on international organisations). The inflation of civil society organisations also served the function of further diluting the voices of dissent. The legislation itself kept out a sizeable proportion of organisations that could not find a place in the restricted definition of civil society due to the selective attitude of the state. This is the case with the civil society organisations that are either based on age-old traditions (see Fonchingong et al. in this volume) or the related forms linked to identity manifestations that go under the name of cultural and development associations. We have not followed this path in the several papers that follow.

The number of civil society organisations has risen considerably following the passing of law No. 90/053 of 19 December, 1990 to define freedom of association in Cameroon (Civic Agenda 1998). Although originally linked to political movements, they have come to be apolitical or rarely political after the 1990-93 crisis years. According to Ballo (1995) they have shown a tendency to work towards the collective good of its members, finding solutions to some collective or individual problems and arousing a new consciousness or dynamics. Women, the youth and the poor are the most attracted to what are likely to improve the lives of members (Ballo 1995; ASPPA and OCISCA 1996). Associational activity has thus been given a new lease of life and pervades all facets of the national scene (Yenshu Vubo 1997a). The potential of these associations for the mobilisation of local peoples in the development process in a spirit of self-reliance and in a

context where the state is unable to look after the needs of these constituencies has been highlighted (Nkwi 1997; Nagel 1987; Yenshu Vubo 1997a, 1998a), although not assessed. Specific associations such as credit and thrift organisations, Parent-Teacher Associations, and women's organisations have also been instrumental in articulating the interests of their members (Nagel 1987; Essombe-Edimu 1993). The trade union movement, once captured by the one-party state, has instead capitulated to political manipulation and internecine disputes to the extent that it is in shambles and can hardly mobilise workers (see Temngah in this volume). Some of the associations which emerged claim development to be their raison d'être, although the recurrent theme in the objectives of cultural and development associations in Cameroon closely links them to the identity question. The implication is that the question of development has followed the ethno-regional drift that has characterised Cameroonian politics in the past decade and a half (Takougang and Krieger 1998; Nyamnjoh 1999; Yenshu Vubo 2003). The locus of national life in politics as in development has thus shifted from the nation-in-the-making to the home village, which either has to rely on its own initiative and resources, or lobby for state intervention in a paternalistic manner. Global national development policies are thus relegated to the background in favour of trade-offs which involve the provision of amenities by a regime in exchange for support from local, supposedly loyal, peoples or tribes. This contractual politics is essentially flawed because of the drastically dwindled financial resource base of the state due to constraints on social investments placed on it by the World Bank and the IMF. This results in a perverted version of local politics which is equated with deceit – where politicians knowingly make promises which they know they cannot keep as a way of winning the battle. The other assumption that the community based on local primordial affinities can be the locus of development is assessed later (see Yenshu Vubo in a separate study in the present volume).

Challenges and Opportunities for Civil Society in Cameroon

Despite the apparent vitality of these organisations, they suffer from weak mobilisation, a narrow territorial base (few are national in scope), the absence of an adequate legislative framework (Civic Agenda 1998; Temngah in the present volume), and the fluctuating attitude of the state (Yenshu Vubo 1998). Moreover they are inscribed within a type of 'piecemeal collectivism' that is incapable of initiating change within the peripheral capitalist framework (Yenshu Vubo 1997b). What is lacking therefore is the organisation of the association movement into a national network capable of presenting an alternative framework for managing the crisis. One need not follow the road of extreme pessimism, as some scholars are wont to do (Nyamnjoh 1999:15). What is absent is an assessment of the potential of these movements often presented in a non-critical, euphoric (Tostensen, Tvedten and Vaa op cit.) or angelic manner (Houtart op cit.). The enthusiasm within the association movement is real, but the orientation is problematic. Both

an assessment of the potential and orientation were therefore deemed necessary. In other words, little is known of their scope, content and functioning, that is, their potential for generating real involvement or participation in public life and genuine development (the possibility for the greatest number of people to achieve satisfactory levels of survival and self-fulfilment).

This boils down to the central question of whether the new civil society or social movements can provide viable alternatives for both development and a participatory framework within the state. This is the substance of the multi-disciplinary investigation that resulted in this volume. Initially we set out to explore the following themes: the quality of non-governmental organisations; the civil rights movement; trade unionism in the post-one party era; alternative strategies to the social integration of the youth; semi-formal and informal financial markets; the legal framework of civil society and social movements; and autonomous associations in the light of Osaghae's 'positive ethnicity' and the concept of self-reliant development. Other issues that we intended to investigate included the role of the religious component of civil society; the women's movement, environmentalism, which is largely an echo of transnational concerns; and the value of traditional associational life in development. We felt that a critical study of these movements could go a long way in enabling us to understand their potential in generating alternative visions and strategies with regard to the crisis. We have covered all these aspects except that of the issue of the civil rights movement.

The general objective of the study was to evaluate the nature and potential of civil society organisations and the role they could play in searching for alternatives to the current impasse around development. The study was conceived first and foremost as a multi-disciplinary endeavour bringing together competences in several disciplines of the social sciences (anthropology, communication, economics, geography and environmental science, political science, sociology, gender studies) and legal studies. Although it draws from the wealth of these disciplines, it humbly restricts itself to an evaluative methodology essentially qualitative in nature, with only an occasional resort to quantification. As can be observed, the project does not nurture an excessive ambition to cover all aspect of civil society, nor to evaluate all forms of development. We restrict ourselves to some key elements of civil society (trade unionism, women's movement, religious groups, home-based associations, NGOs, traditional associational life in the rural areas, and youth), and consider only what they might contribute to development (the social side of development and the environment). Our choices with regard to civil society combine three domains: first, organisations operating as it were in the Gramscian tradition of hegemony and culture, as echoed by the school of alternative society (Houtart, Santa Ana, Gallardo, Vilas) – the church, education, and trade unions. Second, we opted to consider the newer forms promoted by donor concerns with alternative funding outside the state (NGOs). Third, we look at organisa-

tions that command the loyalties of the 'vast majority of the ordinary peoples', in cases reflecting the notion of 'positive ethnicity' – home-based associations, local communities, traditional associational life, informal financial institutions, and local women's mobilisation movement. This third domain is a much forgotten dimension, which has been eclipsed in favour of the fashionable visions of civil society although it constitutes the real foundation on which modern society tries to constitute itself and dominate cultural life in both rural and urban spaces. These organisations stand clearly outside the state and are above the family as the intermediaries through which interests are articulated. In the present context of Africa in general and Cameroon in particular, the three facets of civil society under study constitute the essential tissue of what Vilas calls the expression of the popular dimension of social dynamics, in both modernising and traditional forms, and corresponds to what used to be referred to as the 'People'. These study areas are also the locus of a new civic culture that not only replaces the dilapidated fashions and corroded ethics of a corrupt and unjust regime, but also secretes alternative ethics and practices that are pointers to new directions.

With reference to methodology, we combine a post-facto (historical) analysis and a study of contemporary events. In this way we do not only arrive at an evaluation of achievements over time; we also attempt to capture on-going events within the unending dimension of history. We are therefore arguing that social science, legal studies and allied disciplines, are based on established historical fact, but that this history is an unfinished, open-ended process. This is the more so as we are dealing with the concept of development that is essentially turned towards the future, and with a civil society that is both rooted in the past and provides prospects for a new vision of society.

At the horizontal level, some studies have been regional in scope but some too have attempted to cover as wide a scope of the national territory as possible. We did not attempt to cover all of the national territory or all possible themes related to the domain under investigation. All the studies were conducted by English-speaking social scientists - a fact which by no means implies that there is an Anglophone bias to the work. The four empirical case studies (Fonchingong, Enoh Tanjong, Yenshu Vubo and Ndenecho) that focus on the Anglophone provinces are rather a personal choice of the authors. They do not claim to be able to extrapolate to the whole country. These studies are complemented by other studies that cut across the linguistic divide (Yenshu Vubo, Awung, Akoko, Temngah), and by reflections that cover the whole country (Ntangsi, Forje, Fongot-Kinni). Of course, in this study the policy background and balance sheet of development performance are global in nature. Our achievement has been, we consider, to have been able to touch on almost all the themes we set out to study. The studies have gained from discussions among the researchers, whose ideas have thereby tended to cross-fertilise one another. We acknowledge the three

workshops and the process of peer critique that have, we trust, contributed to the quality of this work.

The work is divided into three sections. Section I deals with the development policy and legal background. Chapter One situates development experience in Cameroon as a background to the study in general. Chapter Two examines the legal and institutional framework for the operation of civil society and social movements in Cameroon. This Chapter provides us with the contextual parameters within which to evaluate the action of civil society. Section II presents an evaluation of some of the key actors, with chapters involving trade unions and religious organisations. Section III explores the interface between tradition and modernity as found in associations in traditional society, home-based associations and informal financial institutions functioning in the wake of institutional reforms and women's protest movements. Section IV is devoted to the study of non-governmental organisations as the most projected form of civil society organisations (CSOs). The authors not only explore the public appreciation of their effectiveness, they also evaluate their impact in certain specific domains (watershed management and environmental protection). A last section is made up of two chapters. One chapter explores the complex relationship between state and civil society and proposes ways forward within the current dispensation. The last chapter examines the place of the youth in the reorientation of the educational system as a basis for alternative strategies towards development. A synthesis provides a final conclusion to the work.

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