

12

Towards a Synthesis

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In an attempt to write a synthesis of contributions to a book of this nature there is always a risk of repeating the conclusions already made in the individual presentations. In order to avoid such a temptation the best approach would be to present a summary of the debates that took place during the workshops to discuss contributions and evaluate the level of the work covered. We will start with a presentation of the conclusion of the workshop debates and then proceed to an evaluation of the work. We will conclude finally with the question of whether the civil society is searching for development, is it posing alternative development actions or is it merely a pointer in the intellectual (theory, policy, programmes) and practical reformulation of development?

I

(i) There is widespread disenchantment with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other modern sector organisations (common initiative groups, economic interest groups, cooperatives and associations) after a period of initial euphoria and exaggerated optimism. Some NGOs tend to lapse into 'briefcase' organisations while others simply function as branches of external NGOs. This is principally the result of initial attempts to restrict civil society to the legalised domain and modern structures that were the source of official support and lavish external funding. For a long time the enthusiasm for creating these structures was both funding-driven and prompted by opportunism rather than by a genuine attempt to contribute to shaping an alternative sector. In this regard the complicity and complacency of transnational NGOs and funding consortiums of the North only exacerbated the ensuing crisis of legitimacy and performance. In fact, the modern civil society sector was a veritable underground economy providing untaxed earnings and enriching promoters (Yenshu Vubo 1998a), constituting as it were a new white-collar sector. Its failure can thus be said to have been predictable as can be said of 'euphoric' (Tostensen, Tvedten & Vaa

2001) and 'angelic' (Houtart 1998) visions of civil society. The outcome of the performance of NGOs leads us to contrast this largely 'invented civil society' with civil society that emerges from local forces. The future outcome of this sector will therefore depend on its capacity to anchor itself in the social fabric and stand the test of time. In the process, connections with the other sectors of civil society, especially the endogenous, will be vital as has been suggested elsewhere for the women's movement (Yenshu Vubo 1998b). In the same way the reform of the NGO sector should revisit the model of existing partnerships and division of labour marked by the subordination of local NGOs to agendas set by external agencies and dependency vis-à-vis external funding (Yenshu Vubo 1998a:47, Mohan 2002). For it to stand on its own feet, this sector must both be indigenous and exercise a large measure of autonomy. The whole process will imply synchronising the activities of the multi-layered civil society world, structured in local, ethno-regional, national and transnational strata in the image of Touraine's (1996) multi-layered world of locals, nationals and cosmopolitans, in order to achieve equilibrium and a balance of forces.

(ii) The state exhibits differential attitudes towards civil society organizations (CSOs) depending on whether they are hostile, docile or collaborative towards a state characterised by repression, indifference or attempts at cooptation. There is also a discriminatory application of laws. For instance, while previous legislation was inspired by an environment characterised by overarching state security issues inspiring the laws against subversion and state security, recent worries are about terrorism, especially after the famous 9/11 events. As such, groups can be prohibited and tagged when their objectives and actions are not favourable to the regime. This situation is compounded by the wide-ranging discretionary powers wielded by administrators in offering accreditation - all this dictated by a fear that civil society organisations will get involved in politics, especially of the anti-regime type. The group was of the opinion that these fears were unfounded since all civil society activity was potentially political if politics was to be defined as the competition over the management of public life. A tightening regulation over civil society in the name of security is a violation of citizens' rights in their claim to manage their affairs.

(iii) There is dispersed and uncoordinated legislation and judicial processes governing civil society organisations (CSOs). This leads to legal confusion in the domain of civil society as well as confusion in administrative coordination. The accreditation process was tight in some cases and extremely loose in others. As NGOs needed to survive for three years before obtaining accreditation, this drove many of them underground. Moreover, one legal obstacle to the blossoming of some CSOs is the abnormally long period it takes for the application guidelines ('textes d'application') to be enacted, even when a law governing a form of CSOs has been passed by the legislature and enacted by the President of the Republic. In contrast, there is a vast domain of unregulated or loosely regulated

associational life in the so-called 'informal' sector, community development associations, improvement unions, cultural associations, local solidarity societies etc., where it suffices for a people to constitute themselves into a group to gain de facto recognition from administrative authorities. Most of these structures function on the basis of by-laws or internal rules and regulations alone. The space of unregulated organisations is vast and provides a potential for liberating action. Such self-sustaining associations should not be the subject of administrative control.

The group recommended that it was instructive to learn from international legislation in the matter and institute a single legal instrument, a Charter, which would spell out the general guidelines according to which all CSOs should operate. These principles can then be adapted to specific types of organisations. In this context the bi-jural nature of the state was not likely to be of assistance while lifting parts of foreign legislation and transposing them to the local context was going to be prejudicial to any reform process. Besides, the civil society itself should be instrumental in advocacy for improvement in types of legislation relating to itself in particular and the legislation process in general.

Traditional associations, movements and organisations are the source of vitality within civil society because of their strong social bonds, their capacity to act as social solidarity funds and their capacity to mobilise, although they may be misinterpreted by the state. They derive their legitimacy from their historical depth and need to be given administrative recognition. They stand in an ambiguous position between tradition and modernity and are instrumental in building old and new social ties in the society. Concerning the question of the traditional aspects of civil society and the issues of identity. Vilas (1998:69) has remarked that the most salient aspect of the recent concern with civil society has been the increasing importance of the socio-cultural framework of collective action. Meanwhile Touraine (1996) argues that one of the important stakes of contemporary social movements even in the West has become the question of culture. Our concern with this domain also answers the question of the historical dimension of civil society as posed by Mamdani (1995:613-614) and Mohan's (2002:135) call that civil society be interpreted 'through culturally relevant norms and practices'. They become part of Osaghae's positive ethnicity (1998) or progressive action by the claims they make on the state and the argument for the right to self-organisation within the polity in line with Touraine's conception of historicity (1974:94) presented as 'cette action de transformation de la société par elle-même' (that process of the society transforming itself) as opposed to nefarious forms of ethnicity, which are the source of inter-community strife, animosity and conflict. This is where an essential dividing line has to be drawn between the two phenomena, which are the source of intense ideological confusion. Craig (1998:12) argues rightly as many others that 'identity politics is not itself necessarily the basis for progressive forms of action', but we also agree with Breytenbach (1998:40) that ethnic forms of action 'should not be excluded simply because they are

ethnic'. Touraine's model considers identity as one of the three constitutive principles of social movements alongside opposition and totality (Ferréol et al. 1995:157-158). Touraine argues that identity is not a simple reflex action, the discovery of social coordinates, the assumption of roles and statuses, but the birth of a social movement in itself (ibid.:185), and that a cultural fall-back position always challenges the political system that takes responsibility for social organisation (ibid.:206). Néveu (2000:81), for his part, argues that the identity dimension is an integral part of social movements and that social movements are also the special moments for the construction and maintenance of identities. He goes on to indicate that protest is a fertile ground for identity formation. It is in this light that one has to interpret the local women's movement covered in this volume. In the African context local institutions became civil society (and not simply Breytenbach's proto-civil society) from the time the modern state excluded them from the modern sphere of governance.

(iv) Informal financial institutions tend to replace the formal banking system because the latter are procedural and cumbersome while the former are flexible, accountable and quick at problem-solving. They are credible forces that transcend ethnic boundaries. They are collectors of small savings, offer loans at very considerate interest rates and operate on a self-help basis. They offer services that banks in the main are unable to offer mainly because of the restructuring undertaken within the reforms of the financial sector. The banks have become more prohibitive to the common man in terms of preconditions for opening accounts, saving and obtaining loans. The so-called informal sector has become the common man's financial market in the increasingly precarious situation of the economic crisis of the 1980s and the early 1990s and the SAP imposed by the Washington Consensus.

The study confirms the fact that these structures are more anchored in the social context than the formal or, more still, formalised sector. The social networks, social solidarity, the safety networks and the self-help spirit are the cardinal points at the basis of their operation but they are also the basis of small-scale investment necessitating relatively little capital as well as investments in social consumption, well-being and cultural capital. In this way, they are contributing to individual personal development, firstly by serving as palliatives and safety nets in a context of increasing poverty, and secondly by contributing towards the improvement of people in low income categories. They stand in clear contrast to big financial institutions, which contribute only to accumulation for the rich and discriminate against (by eliminating and disqualifying) the poor. That is the law of the system. Moreover, the inability of the banks to thrive in the local context scares away even those local people who can afford to operate savings with them.

The question arises as to whether we can classify the informal financial institutions within civil society. To the extent that they are associations situated outside the family/kin group and the state, they are civil society. In the same vein they are civil society because they are situated outside the global market (especially the

global financial market), although constituting an alternative and budding financial market of their own. Their ability to compete with the mainstream modern financial sector (although not in a brutal or confrontational manner) puts them along other civil society organisations that are in search of alternative visions for society. They may form the basis of the future markets of local capital that can be classified with the other sectors of the economy as the market (in the sense of an overarching sector of the modern economy), but for now it is out of that sector and can be classified as an indigenous civil society sector. When compared with the other sectors that are not strictly formal (cooperatives, NGOs, credit unions) they are definitely the pointer to a new direction that has to be harnessed. This most neglected sector has only been the subject of much negative appraisal by the state whose only craving has been to regulate it. Ways must be explored to integrate this sector in the official local financial market and very much in the direction of solving its problems.

(v) State interference tends to disempower civil society (either by capturing vital segments and subordinating them to partisan interests, by the demonisation of critical elements or administrative harassment) while certain forms of civil society are overtly rebellious (either due to the ignorance of their roles or a reaction to administrative hostility).¹ These two trends constitute obstacles to a rapprochement between the two. The ideal in state-civil society relations is that they should be complementary and not mutually repulsive or distrustful of each other. Moreover the tendency for civil society to be split along regime-opposition lines does not serve the interest of development or the future of society as such. The state has to allow the civil society its domain for it to play a meaningful role.

(vi) There is a need to be more focused on what form of development one is concerned with. There have been too many fluctuations in the mood of development thinking and practice over the past decade. The search for development alternatives should be inward-looking with the watch word being self-reliance and autonomy first as a challenge to dependency. External inputs should be a catalyst rather than the main thrust of development. The main goal should also be general human welfare.

(vii) Religious organisations and other forms of associations provide a much-desired ethical dimension to society that is generally absent in public life. They are first and foremost schools of management and accountability. The current configuration of the religious organisations situate them clearly within civil society by dint of all definitions whether systemic, radical, or reformist. While some are involved in the social mission of alleviating poverty among the poor or instituting social welfare programmes among the faithful, others are involved in gospels of prosperity (and hence accumulation) as a solution to current problems of poverty. One is critical of the state and market policies in a critique that one would characterise as internal to the system while others are facilitators of the market via the adoption of accumulation as a creed. One can fault some of these policies

for being inscribed in welfarist notions of development marked by traditions of gender imbalance and couched in traditions of insulation from global issues. In this regard they are sectarian and evidently partisan as they target only the 'faithful' in their specific zones of influence despite their universalising message. In their own light they are complementary coping strategies that have not been integrated into overall development strategies. There is a need therefore to integrate these strategies into overall development policies and programmes as is the case in the domain of health and education. However, one needs to commend these organisations for their early tendency to tackle the gender question by designing gender-sensitive programmes, however limited in scope they may be. The same has to be said about the quality of social services (education, health) that are universally considered to be the best, even ranking above public and private services.

(viii) In terms of performance one can contrast external NGOs and home-grown or local NGOs and home-based associations or solidarity unions, the labour unions and the professional unions, religious organisations and private or state social services, etc. There is a need to compare all of these trends. There is therefore differential performance with each structure having a comparative advantage over the other, needing to learn from each other and therefore complementing each other.

(ix) There is a gap between the content of pedagogy in the modern school system and the milieu in which the youth are situated. This gap tends to relegate rural peoples to the fringes of modern life and widens the village-city gap, generates unemployment, alienates the youth, reproduces redundancy through educated unemployment and orchestrates a new wave of massive expatriation of vigorous youngsters to the North. There is also a tendency towards capability and livelihood deprivation that not only puts the youth in crisis but jeopardises the very future of African societies. These developments necessitate a reorientation of the educational system and a re-situation of the school system within the community. This will be much in the direction of 'functional training... a continuity of moral values derived from the indigenous cultures and the transmission of economically useful skills' (Yenshu Vubo 1998c:21). The arguments of the workshops and presentations argue for 'the younger generation [to] be given autonomy and individual initiative in the process' (ibid.). The radical reform process will also recover talents that risk being rejected by the modern school system. This will be based on and serve as the basis of an inward-looking philosophy of education and development that integrates ethics and local knowledge systems and skills in the content of curricular, the model of development and the management of affairs (both public and private business). Such a vision challenges the prevailing monolithic thinking that serves as the building blocks of the current one-dimensional world order in the name of globalisation.

One often repeated objection to operating in African languages as pedagogic and management tools is extreme diversity and a multilingualism considered as perverted (evidently a modernist bias). This very obstacle is not alluded to when

fundamentalist religious messages are translated into every language that has at least 25,000 speakers. This simply means that mono-lingualism only serves to transmit dominant visions of development. On the contrary, functional literacy and authentic education is best in no other language than that of the speaker. Moreover the experiences of trans-ethnic and trans-frontier polyglot businessmen in Africa point to the fact that 'polyglotism' and not mono-lingualism is a viable solution. In other words, cultural diversity will not cease to be problematic when it is inscribed within stifling mono-lingual spaces. Diversity management as cultural development will only benefit from experiences in multilingualism.

This vision of development seeks to restore autonomy chiefly from the ideological and hence pedagogic standpoint. It is perfectly in line with Paulo Freire's (1985:55) humanising pedagogy taking the youth as a creative starting point. The cardinal point is autonomy in which people assert their right to historicity or the capacity to produce their orientations and give meaning to their actions (Touraine 1974). Amin considers this to be the radical break operated by the development of modernity when

... humanity was called to the knowledge that human beings make their own history, that they can and even must do so, and that to do so they must choose ... To say that human beings make their history is to propose an organized social frame which facilitates the creation of an emancipatory project (Amin 2000:590-591).

It is in such a context that any current African renaissance project should be inscribed.

II

What can be deduced from the present work is that we have only covered a fragment of the civil society domain and only a tiny aspect of development, although an important one. The papers have each in their own way attempted to cover as wide an area of the national territory as possible. Even then we have only scratched the vast terrain of civil society as it is blossoming in Cameroon. What this points to is that the task is essentially an unfinished one and that this is only one in many of the works that have been and are yet still to be undertaken in the domain. A lot has actually been left out: the cooperative movement, the peasant movement, the syndicates of businessmen, the motor car drivers' unions, the sectarian autonomist or secessionist movements, traders' unions, etc. This shows that civil society is a vast field that would take more than one volume to cover.

This is also true of development. We have only concentrated on those aspects of development that the civil society of the nature we identified could handle. We have explored the labour question, social development, environmental and watershed protection, civil or civic rights, small-scale financing, gender issues, land rights, coping with economic crises, relations to the state and citizenship. We have not been able to explore the question of industrialisation, public works,

peasant concerns with commodity prices (see the concern with cotton prices within which Cameroon's voice is virtually eclipsed), consumer concerns with quality and prices (indeed quite a few consumer associations have been formed of recent), decentralisation, traders' concerns with the tax burden and duties, and many other social development issues. However, we have been able to examine certain hitherto unexplored dimensions such as the traditional aspects of civil society, the issue of identity within civil society, legal reforms around civil society, an evaluation of civil society, a comparative analysis of religious organisations as civil society bodies, and the question of alternatives to the current revisions that have characterised development over the past four decades. This has given us the possibility of determining to some extent the contribution of civil society to development. We can say that the most visible contributions of this dimension of civil society are in the domains of the social (provision of social amenities, development of a corporate spirit, self-help insurance schemes) and the political (citizenship, civil rights, contribution to public debate and advocacy). It is also showing signs of contributing to a budding alternative financial sector that is at the basis of much-needed funds for development. This may not be much but the very awareness of the need for mobilising funds is a step in the right direction.

Imperfections and insufficiencies abound, especially in the very problematic state-civil society relations and the legal framework. The one remark that can be made is that this is due to the state scepticism about civil society and its assimilation of all forms of protest to anti-regime activity with its consequences in terms of change of regime. This brings us to the question of the role of civil society. Can civil society become an autonomous domain? If so, what will be its role? This takes us to the issue of whether civil society is an alternative vehicle of development, either in posing acts or proposing new visions. Evidently, civil society promises new approaches to public performance but is limited by the very dimensions of its capacity. It can and is active in social and political development but cannot substitute for the state in its sovereign and collective function, or even propose new regimes. The functions of the state are far-reaching and too vast for civil society, while regime issues are questions of the development of political classes.

However, the style and vision of civil society can be a catalyst in determining the directions a society and its state apparatus take by shaping legislation, political awareness and style of political practices. As Vilas (op cit.:73) has posited, civil society is distinct from political society but is not a stranger to politics because the term civil society has clear political undertones. Among the potential functions of civil society (to be contrasted with the political manipulations of certain sections of the civil society) one can identify three: creation and expansion of democratic space through civic education and mobilisation; involvement of civil society in radical political reform; and development of political forces that will emerge and detach themselves from the civil society stream. In the last case mention needs to be made of intellectuals and trade union leaders who have moved from the

protest dimension of civil society to occupy the centre stage of politics as reformist leaders, for example, Lech Walesa (Poland), Vaclav Havel (Czech Republic), Fernando Cardoso and Ignacio Lula (Brazil), Frederick Chiluba (Zambia), Tom Mboya (Kenya). In that regard, the civil society is a complementary arm of the public sphere that has to be recognised by the state and given free vent by all regimes. In fact, Vilas (*ibid.*) concludes that it would be unwise for the state to seek to politically neutralise civil society. It is also incumbent on this civil society to be respectful of its limits and its catalytic (rather than replacement) role. The civil society has its advantages that it must jealously protect and which it must not lose by trying to engage in two competing public spheres, namely the modern economy as separated from the domestic sphere (in the Weberian sense of capitalist development) and politics as the public sphere for the exercise of power. These advantages are neutrality, non-profit and low cost. Where civil society engages in partisan politics or engages in the market economy by way of an underground economy, it loses in credibility. The partisan messages of partisan politics corrupt the transcendental message and posture of civil society movements, which only succeed by providing moral censure to public life.³ Market competition will lead to a loss of low cost, non-profit and philanthropy that are other transcendental aspects of civil society. The rise of civil society adds a third sector or dimension to society besides the state and the market.⁴ These three domains act as checks to each other: the state provides the orientation and framework (policy, legislation, judicial) for the deployment of economic activity and the emergence of the civil society; the economic sector organises the production and distribution functions fashioning consumption patterns and determining well being; civil society provides the domain of free association and the moral and social framework for the state and the market. Distortions arise when there is interference across domains; hence the need for mutual respect of domains. Such mutual respect is necessary for the advancement of society as an integrated structure and not an entity fragmented along opposing lines.

Notes

1. In fact the dream of the regime has been to put civil society to its own uses and place it at the service of a neo-liberal political frame in the style of what Samir Amin calls 'low intensity democracy' (2001), that is, 'exclusively a political democracy' (2000:592).
2. For more on the transcendental nature of civil society see Gramsci in Tejada (1998:31-32).
3. This view is in opposition to the much publicised and depoliticised domain which goes under the name of third sector.
4. We are following the footsteps of Houtart (*op cit.*:19) who argues that civil society is situated at the crossroads between the state and the market (another name for the dominant capitalist economy) and existing in a dialectical relation to the two: '... la société civile se situe bien au carrefour du marché et de l'Etat, distincte mais en relation dialectique avec les deux, c'est-à-dire en étroite dépendance de la manière dont ils sont définis, mais aussi capable d'agir sur l'un comme sur l'autre, en fonction des forces existantes'.

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