

The Changing Role of Civil Society in Zimbabwe's Democratic Processes: *2014 and Beyond*

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... it is important to remind ourselves that the role of civil society – and especially NGOs – is to fill in the spaces in a healthy democracy and not to substitute for government ... (Edwards 2000: 15).

[C]ivil society has a role to play but I have the impression that you are a little bit anchored to the past where instead of seeing NGOs one perceives AGOs, Anti-Government Organisations. And if you start catching the flair of the time, the trend, there is an opening to be worked upon. (Aldo Dell'Arricia, EU Ambassador to Zimbabwe, June 2014)

Introduction

July 31, 2013 was a critical juncture in Zimbabwe's socioeconomic and political development. It sealed the fate of the 2009–2013 three-party coalition government. In fact, from the womb of 2013, two mega processes were born. The first was the finalisation of the long drawn-out constitution-making process. The new social contract, which had been peacefully and overwhelmingly endorsed by Zimbabweans through the March 2013 referendum, replaced the much-tattered founding Constitution of 1980. The second relates to the tripartite elections – Presidential,

Parliamentary and Local Government – which ended the four-year quarrelsome marriage of Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF, Morgan Tsvangirai's MDC-T and Arthur Mutambara's – later Welshman Ncube's – MDC. All three were comprehensively won by ZANU-PF. The scale of the victory triggered questions about the continued viability of opposition politics in Zimbabwe and the relevance and role of Civil Society and strategic partners of opposition parties during the previous one and a half decades.

One of the liveliest and most contested post-election issues is the 'appropriate' role of civil society. Increasingly, much of civil society speaks the language of active 'engagement', i.e. working with, rather than substituting the government. This is reflected in the point being raised by Bob Edwards and Dell'Arricia, at the opening of this paper. A few civil society organisations (CSOs) think it is still too early to engage the leopard; perhaps it is these which former EU Ambassador referred to as AGOs. The discourse rages on and perspectives differ, sometimes sharply. This paper is an attempt to join the debate and hopefully add value to both the discourse and the practice.

Context: A Changing Political Economy

Zimbabwe is undergoing seismic political and economic shifts that leave no facet of society untouched. While changes may neither be visible nor palpable, their effects on civil society are both comprehensive and unmistakable. This explains the pivotal movements taking place in some social sectors, principally within the ruling ZANU-PF party.

The results of the watershed July 2013 elections stunned many, including the victors, who appeared too shocked to celebrate. According to official results, Robert Mugabe, ZANU-PF's presidential election candidate, won a resounding 61 per cent (2,110,434) of the votes compared to just 34 per cent (1,172,349) garnered by his long-time rival, Morgan Tsvangirai (MDC-T).¹ In Parliament, ZANU-PF captured more than the magic two-thirds majority (73 per cent) that enables it to amend the newly minted 2013 Zimbabwe Constitution. ZANU-PF also won the local authority elections, claiming a resounding 76 per cent (1,493) of the 1,953 local government wards; the MDC-T won only 23 per cent (442).

ZANU-PF thus became a super-majority party, effectively reinstalling its one-party hegemony. The results also brought into sharp focus the future of Zimbabwe's opposition politics and governance-oriented

civil society. Indeed, the subsequent convulsions in the MDC-T – the main opposition party – were largely occasioned by the comprehensive and shocking defeat. To the extent that civil society has been embedded – consciously or inadvertently – in the ranks of the opposition, the MDC-T's embarrassing defeat was also humiliating for civil society, not to mention a sobering experience and a prompt to introspect, reinvent itself and recalibrate its role in a changed political economy.

This paper is a critical appraisal of civil society post-2013 elections and an interrogation of what its proper role should be in the democratisation of the country as it moves forward. It proceeds from the premise that the biggest casualty of the super-majority triumph of ZANU-PF is political accountability, both vertically and horizontally. It also proceeds from the related prognosis that an obstinate reality for Zimbabwe in the next decade is that the opposition will be so fragile and weak such that it will be unable to perform its official role in Parliament. In other words, the opposition movement will be unable to effectively perform one of its cardinal roles, namely that of extracting accountability from those who control the commanding heights of the state. This burden now falls on other stakeholders, of which the most important is civil society.

Lost in a Changing Political Economy

'Political economy' is a distinctive mode of analysis that examines how political

¹ The corresponding share of the votes for the two candidates in March 2008 was reportedly 48 per cent (1,195,562) for Tsvangirai and 43 per cent for Robert Mugabe (1,079,730); turnout was 43 per cent of all registered voters.

power and economic resources are distributed and contested in particular contexts. In fragile and conflict-affected environments especially, it focuses on the risks and opportunities facing actors, thus helping to inform feasible and realistic expectations of what can be achieved through various courses of action (World Bank 2008; DfID 2009). A distinctive feature of Zimbabwe in its crisis decade (1998–2008) was that its political economy changed fundamentally but some stakeholders/actors did not seem to have quickly and adequately recognised this, or taken stock of the new reality and thus responded appropriately and timeously. Those actors who were seemingly blind to the fast-evolving political economy included most of civil society and their strategic allies, the political opposition. The irony was that it was the instigators of the crisis, i.e. ZANU-PF, which first observed the radical consequences in a reshaped political economy.

Take, for instance, the labour force market. This underwent radical structural changes both quantitatively and qualitatively. Godfrey Kanyenze et al. (2011: 275) reported that formal sector employment shrank by half, ‘from a peak of 1.4 million in 1998 to an estimated 700,000 in 2007’ and that the proportion of the population employed in the formal sector ‘declined from 14 per cent in 1980 to around 6 per cent by 2007’. Statistics on employment notoriously vary widely. According to UNOCHA (2008), only 480,000 were formally employed in 2008, down from 3.6 million

in 2003, and that unemployment in the formal sector was as high as 94 per cent, of which approximately 68 per cent were youth (Sitima and Hlatywayo 2013: 786). Further, besides *quantity*, there was also a decline in the *quality* of the formally employed labour force and an increasing casualisation of labour because of the ease with which such labour can be hired and fired.

Of more importance was the informalisation of the economy in general during this crisis period. Some of the features of the informal sector are that it is ‘unprotected’, ‘excluded’, ‘unregistered’ or ‘unrepresented’. The massive informalisation as of 2004 was again captured by Kanyenze et al.: ‘on the basis of the job-based concept, 975,000 people had formal jobs, while 4.1 million had informal jobs. This therefore implies that four out of every five jobs in Zimbabwe were informalised in 2004’ (2011: 277). Up to 90 per cent of these jobs were unskilled and nearly two-thirds (63 per cent) of such employees were in urban areas. Given that 80 per cent of the informal sector activities were one-person concerns (autonomous social actors) they could not afford to strike or protest against the state, lest it affect them directly and where it would hurt most – the pocket. Nor were such people available for ZCTU²-convened stayaways (which were very effective and widely supported in the late 1990s) or to do voluntary work – civic or political – for CSOs and/or political parties, except under duress. Such

² The ZCTU is the largest trade union apex body in the country.

duress was not easily available to opposition parties but ZANU-PF could dispense such coercion, either physically or through denial of valued public goods and services such as land and food aid.

These developments in the economy had implications on politics and civil society work. It may be remembered that both civil society and the labour-based MDC had more or less the same constituency base but, over time, its members migrated into the invisible sector, where they escaped capture by both. During the Government of National Unity (GNU), ZANU-PF designed specific strategies and incentives to capture this constituency. These were centred in the Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Employment Creation and included easy-access loans for the youth and women and community share ownership schemes targeting rural communities. In urban areas, the ZANU-PF-aligned youth militia, for example Chipangano in Harare, ensured that informal vendors were 'captured' by the party by availing market stalls and related services only to members of their party.

Then there were the vast artisanal miners (popularly known as *makorokoza*, unregistered or illegal miners) in many parts of the country, especially in Mashonaland West and East, Midlands and Manicaland. Most were, and are, the rural poor, attempting to eke out a living through gold and diamond panning, are very mobile and move in large numbers. In 2003, some 400,000 people were actively mining gold and almost two million people relied directly or indirectly

on the income it generated. Estimates around 2012 were that there were over half a million active small-scale gold miners and another two million who were directly dependent on gold mining (Singo 2012).

A few months before the July 2013 elections, the Minister of Mines dangled a juicy carrot before them when he announced government's intention to regularise or formalise their operations. For this target group, such news was manna from heaven and must have elicited the expected political response at the ballot box. Civil society activists could not, or were unwilling to, connect with such a fickle sector of the populace even though they represented a large proportion of the voting population. Certainly, this sector was no longer part of the cohort of people who had formed the bedrock of the MDC at its formation in 1999. Things had changed, yet the opposition and its allies had remained more or less static, which was folly in a changed and changing political economy.

In short, civil society did not have its ears 'tuned in' to the changing political economy. Regrettably, academia was not of much help either. Several reasons may account for this. To my knowledge, the current crop of graduates and young lecturers in the Humanities are not well-schooled in this paradigm, which apparently lost its glitter in both theory and practice after the collapse of empirical socialism of the Soviet era. Political economy was thrown out with the bathwater, mistakenly equated with socialism when in fact it also has a

conservative/liberal stream or variant – the public choice school. Consequently, few Zimbabwean social scientists are conversant with this analytical approach.

The other reason has to do with the social distance between many CSOs and academia. This is particularly true of the activist wing of civil society, which tends to have a disdain for ‘armchair’ critics who are not in the ‘trenches’. Until recently, the reflex reaction of much of the civic community to research was to dismiss it on account of being ‘too academic’ and not grounded. It must also be said that much of this reaction was due to the failure of civics to nurture a culture of research and evidence-based analysis. This, however, is beginning to change.

Lastly, but of no less importance, is that the restrictive political environment has discouraged the emergence of a critical mass of public intellectuals who engage with public issues and share their views with various stakeholders, including civil society, the media and public institutions such as Parliament. This is tragic, but as long as the highly polarised social and political order continues, the phenomenon of the disengaged intellectual will likely grow and even solidify as the ‘proper’ and ‘expected’ conduct of the intellectual class. This paper firmly believes that Zimbabwe is the poorer for this attitude.

Conceptual Considerations

Conceptualisations of Civil Society

Today, civil society is perhaps one of the

most seductive terms in the practice of democracy promotion and in social science discourse. Yet it is, as will be shown, a shifting and contested concept. To put it in Winston Churchill’s language, ‘civil society’ is a term that suffers from ‘definitional inexactitude’. More often than not, civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are conflated. This is understandable, as both inhabit the same realm. This paper considers civil society as a more inclusive phenomenon, of which NGOs are a part. No extensive conceptual discussion of civil society will, however, be attempted here; neither space nor mandate allows this. Even so, a brief conceptual detour is in order.

For Goran Hyden, writers ‘typically assume that civil society is made up of the associational life organised between family and state’. For him, civil society is not a ubiquitous phenomenon found in every society but is associated with a particular context: ‘Such a society is inevitably modern, relies on a market based economy, and rests on the principle of rule of law’. Further, such a society thrives best where there is relative plenty: ‘Civicness’ is more easily promoted in conditions of plenty than in poverty’ (Hyden, 2012: 179). This conceptual approach has its roots in the political thought of nineteenth-century French philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville and, according to Foley and Edwards, this perspective ‘puts special emphasis on the ability of associational life in general and the habits of association in particular to patterns of civility in the actions of citizens

in a democratic polity' (1996: 39). In other words, civil society is defined by its associational life and its habits of association and occupies any space between the family and the state. Foley and Edwards call this perspective 'Civil Society I'. The reality is that by following this conceptual approach, it becomes problematic to talk about civil society in most of present-day Africa. The question is whether these characteristics exist in present-day Zimbabwe.

The other perspective, which Foley and Edwards call 'Civil Society II', 'lays emphasis on civil society as a sphere of action that is independent of the state and that is capable – precisely for this reason – of energising resistance to a tyrannical regime' (Ibid.). In other words, it emphasises the importance of civil associations as a *counterweight* to the state.

Civil society is also often discussed in relation to three other domains: the family, the state and the market.³ For our purposes, Edwards's conceptualisation is apt:

At its simplest, *civil society is the arena in which people come together to pursue the interests they hold in common* – not for profit or political power, but because they care enough about something to take collection. (1998: 2, emphasis in original)

Edwards also says 'civil society includes all associations and networks between the family and the state except firms' (2000: 7). In this paper, the market is a sector that is not considered as an integral part of civil

³ Some conceptions exclude the market (the economy).

society, but rather as a separate sector.

Lloyd Sachikonye, however, seems to take a more encompassing view of civil society that includes economic institutions. After surveying the various conceptualisations of civil society, Sachikonye (1995: 7) writes:

One working definition is that in the most abstract sense, civil society can be conceived as an aggregate of institutions whose members are engaged primarily in a complex of non-state activities – economic and cultural production, voluntary associations and household life – and who in this way preserve and transform their identity by exercising all sorts of pressures or controls upon state institutions. (1995: 7)

For Sachikonye, civil society is variegated and could include such organisations as professional associations of different kinds, student organisations, independent communications media, business associations, trade unions, co-operatives and various NGOs. The church and its affiliated organisations constitute another important part of civil society (Ibid).

In the same vein, the EU's broad conception of CSOs is inclusive of all non-state actors, not-for-profit structures and non-partisan and non-violent organisations through which people organise shared objectives and ideals, whether political, cultural, social or economic (EU 2012: 3). According to this definition, CSOs operate at various levels – local, national, regional and international – and comprise urban and rural, formal and informal organisations,

inclusive of NGOs, faith-based organisations, foundations, research institutions, trade unions and employer organisations, co-operatives, professional and business associations and the non-for-profit media.

This paper also takes a three-pronged view of democratic society, of which two legs are the state and the market. In this conceptualisation, a healthy democratic society is one in which each of the three legs is strong and performs its salutary function/s. The core function or role of civil society is that of promoting and defending the public interest or common good against real or potential abuse by the state and/or the market. No one pillar should exist in 'splendid isolation' from the other two. If one leg is weak, the entire structure will likely collapse. Indeed, no viable democracy has endured where one of the legs remains weak over a period of time. The structure is destabilised and rendered brittle, resulting in a fragile situation similar to the last fifteen years in Zimbabwe.

The focus of this paper is on explicitly governance-related CSOs. Of course, there are many other organisations whose activities have governance implications, but they are not our primary interest.

Civil Society and Democratisation

Historically, and in the contemporary world, no sustainable democracy has been crafted or developed organically without a vibrant civil society. It cannot be disputed that civil society has emerged as the most widely discussed aspect of democracy in recent years. It has also been celebrated as the

'missing middle' in democratisation and development generally. Indeed, Jeremy Rifkin calls civil society 'our last, best hope' (Rifkin in Edwards 1998: 2). It is an essential though not sufficient condition for democratic transition and consolidation.

Foley and Edwards raise the intriguing but uncomfortable prospect of civil society also being as a mechanism for stifling democracy:

If civil society is a beachhead secure enough to be of use in thwarting tyrannical regimes, what prevents it from being used to undermine democratic governments? to understand the role of civil society in the modern world, we must discern how and under what circumstances a society's organised components contribute to political strength or political failure (1996: 45).

One of the most critical theoretical and empirical questions is: Does civil society promote democratisation or it is a democratic order that gives rise to the emergence and development of civil society? Of this 'chicken and egg' scenario, Clair Mercer (2002: 12) suggests that 'NGO sectors are indeed more vibrant in places where some form of democracy has been the political norm for some time.'

Democracy is still a fragile plant in Zimbabwe; so is civil society. Is this a coincidence? This takes us to what Michael Walzer calls 'the paradox of the civil society argument', which according to Foley and Edwards means:

[A] democratic civil society seems to require a democratic state, and a strong civil society

seems to require a strong and responsive state. The strength and responsiveness of a democracy may depend upon the character of its civil society, ... reinforcing both the democratic functioning and the strength of the state. But such effects depend on the prior achievement of both democracy and a strong state. (1996: 48)

Civil Society and Partisanship

One of the perennially contested issues is whether civil society ought to be non-partisan. Most NGOs in many African countries are funded by, and often creatures of, foreign donors. The donors often call the tune to which most CSOs seem to happily dance. Of this, Kamat (2003: 66) laments that 'NGOs become more like the bodies from which they attract funding than like the societies they intend to represent and from which they draw their legitimacy'.

Foley and Edwards ask: 'What is the sense ... and what is the nonsense in the frequent demand that civil associations be "nonpartisan"?' (1996: 49). This paper's departure point is that while civil society is part of the political community it should not be part of the partisan community. This is based on a fine-grained but significant distinction between being *political* and being *partisan*; the two are not the same and should not be conflated. One can be political without being partisan – many citizens worldwide are the former without being the latter. Thus we have a *partisan* political society and *non-partisan* political society. This distinction is crucial in that many of the pitfalls of Zimbabwe's civil society are associated with the

tendency to be part of partisan society and conflate their roles. They want to be treated as non-partisan society but by behaving in a partisan manner and they are consequently treated as such by the party-state. The advocacy for, and promotion of, democracy are political functions; they are not necessarily partisan functions.

Civil society is part of the non-partisan universe, while political parties, for instance, are and ought to be integral to partisan political society. The problem arises, however, when civil society, whose *raison d'être* is the pursuit of public non-partisan causes, acts in ways that advance partisan causes. It is perfectly legitimate for civil society to have common cause with political parties or other partisan animals, but it is an entirely different and problematic issue when civil society becomes an appendage of political parties or becomes embedded in them. Such was the scenario in Zimbabwe post-2000 up to the 2013 elections. Thereafter, most civic organisations seemed to have experienced a 'Damascene moment', acknowledging the need to be objective and alive to their mandate in their association with third-party organisations.

An Overview of Zimbabwe's Civil Society

The place of Zimbabwe's civil society has been dictated by the timing of its birth. Chronologically, CSOs (interchangeably referred to as NGOs) fall into three roughly delineated generations. The 'first generation'

(hereafter called 1G) comprised predominantly humanitarian NGOs that predate independence and largely reacted to the predations visited on indigenous Africans by a colonial regime whose *modus operandi* was racial exclusion and oppression. With the exception of a few, their mission was to alleviate the suffering of the natives and as such these NGOs tended to supplement, and at times and in some places even supplant, the state in the provision of public goods and services. Faith-based organisations such as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP), the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC) and the Zimbabwe Catholic Bishops Conference⁴ (ZCBC) were exceptions to this, particularly the CCJP.

‘Second generation’ (2G) organisations were oriented towards development and were born in Zimbabwe’s Independence Decade (1980–1989), when the new black regime delivered many developmental benefits to the previously marginalised population, especially in the war-ravaged rural areas. Such benefits included education, health centres, agricultural services and roads. The exceptions to the rural focus were organisations such as the Zimbabwe Confederation of Trade Unions (ZCTU, formed in 1981 at the instigation of the state) and the Women Action Group (WAG, 1983).

1G and 2G NGOs were more or less innocuous in the eyes of the post-independence government as the regime viewed

them as allies or partners in development. They often filled a vacuum left by the government, providing health, welfare and educational and other services to a large number of the country’s population, especially the poorer segments in the rural areas. Most shied away from confronting the state, preferring to play a more backstage role to advance and defend their goals and interests. White-led economic organisations were also in this category, most prominently the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries (CZI), Zimbabwe National Chamber of Commerce (ZNCC), Chamber of Mines and the Commercial Farmers’ Union (CFU). Some 2G organisations worked in close collaboration with the state, though the latter often wanted a more paternalistic relationship or even co-opted them (for example, the ZCTU and African farmers unions). The ZCTU rebelled against the state’s paternalism in the first ten years of black governance, and by the end of the 1990s it had become the sharpest and biggest thorn in the regime’s side.

The ‘third generation’ (3G) organisations belong to the governance sector and sprouted and flourished during and after the Adjustment Decade (1990–1999). Significantly, these later played midwife to the MDC in September 1999 under trade unionist Morgan Tsvangirai. In many respects, these emerged to fill the institutional vacuum caused by the weakness of political parties. Leading the pack were the Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU, formed in 1989); Media Institute of Southern Africa

⁴ It also delved into matters that today would be in the arena of human rights and governance.

(MISA-Zimbabwe, 1992); the Zimbabwe Human Rights Association (Zimrights, 1992); the Zimbabwe Lawyers Association (ZIWOLA, 1995); the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (1996); the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA, formed in 1997); the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum (1998); the Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA, formed in 1999); and the Mass Public Opinion Institute (MPOI, 1999).

Stefan Mair and Masipula Sithole (2002: 11-12) described the conditions fertile for this generation of non-governmental entities as follows:

The growing inability of the government to provide social services, the increasing corruption in the government coupled with rising repression, the failure and social costs of economic reform initiated a wave of NGO start-ups the majority of them pursuing a political agendas, forced the established interest groups into politics and confrontation with the government and made the trade unions the backbone of the newly formed opposition movement. The uniting and mobilising issues for this heterogeneous coalition were constitutional reform and, later, the removal of Mugabe from power. The lead agency in the latter became the MDC.

Many other 3G organisations were born in Zimbabwe's post-2000 period in two waves. The first wave was the so-called Crisis Decade (2000 to mid-2008) and the second the GPA era (mid 2008–2013). These organisations mainly operated in the context of

so-called 'strategic alliances' with opposition parties, especially the MDC (or the MDC-T after the 2005 split that resulted in a breakaway MDC faction initially led by Arthur Mutambara and later by Welshman Ncube). Leading 3G organisations of the first wave included the Zimbabwe Peace Project (ZPP, 2000); the Zimbabwe Election Support Network (ZESN, 2000); the Zimbabwe Civic Education Trust (ZIMCET, 2000); the Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZ, 2001); the Women in Politics Unit (Wipsu, 2001); the Bulawayo Agenda (2002); Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA, 2003); and the Progressive Residents Association (BPRA, 2007). Second wave organisations included Heal Zimbabwe (2008); the Harare Residents Trust (2008); the National Youth Development Trust (NYDT); the Centre for Research and Development (2006); the Election Resource Centre (ERC, 2010); the Young Women Institute for Development (2013); and the Centre for Natural Resources Governance (2013).

Most of the 200-odd governance-focused CSOs were formed between 1999 and 2008; only a few others were established during the GNU. As Zimbabwe was in crisis during this ten-year period a vast majority of these CSOs were thus born in crisis, were crisis-oriented,⁵ and under a leadership and had a membership that reached political maturity when Zimbabwe had plunged into a prolonged crisis. This is an important factor, for it shaped the attitude and behaviour of these CSOs.

Indications are that, after the 2013

elections, Zimbabwe has ushered in a new generation, a 'fourth generation' (4G) of CSOs. This is not quite the case. Rather, some 3G organisations are transmuting/metamorphosing, and differentiated from their predecessors by a new focus. Clearly, there is a new mood in the civic community defined not only by a new attitude and approach towards government but also by what CSOs see as a need for scaling-up relationships with grassroots constituencies and with a new focus. 1G and 2G CSOs focused more on 'bread and butter' issues and working with government, whereas 3G organisations seemed to veer towards more abstract political and governance issues, deliberately confronting the political regime.

State-Sponsored CSOs

This discussion would not be complete without highlighting the role of ZANU-PF or Party-State in creating its own civil society community standing in opposition to those agitating for democracy and human rights. Although ZANU-PF prides itself for delivering and protecting democracy and claims that it is a strong defender of human rights, it nevertheless emphasises socio-economic rather than political rights. To this extent, its own universe of CSOs embraced this ideological stance. Such organisations are state-sponsored, receiving financial, administrative, political and moral support. Without exception, they are formed as ri-

⁵ One prominent CSO was/is actually called Crisis in Zimbabwe (CiZ) and was formed in 2001.

vals and counterweights to existing CSOs deemed to be anti-regime/pro-opposition. They thus play a role of spoiler, undermining the credibility and effectiveness of mainstream civics.

A classic example – and one of the first such organisations – was the Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions. It was created in 1998 as a rival to the ZCTU, which the government accused of abandoning workers and having a political agenda after it organised crippling strikes and stay-aways in 1997 and 1998. Gilbert Tarugarira commented:

The formation of the Zimbabwe Federation of Trade Unions (ZFTU) in 1998 raised eyebrows, amid wide speculation that it was launched to counter the effectiveness of the ZCTU. The political alliance between the ZFTU and the government could not be doubted because its proponents were ZANU (PF) activists in the likes of war veterans. (2011: 215)

In most respects, the ZFTU was the polar opposite of the mainstream ZCTU, and its militant modus operandi concerning employers was designed to demonstrate that it was there to produce results for workers. Hence, the Commercial Workers Union, the Associated Mine Workers' Union, the Zimbabwe Construction Workers' Union and the Transport and General Workers' Union, for example, were attracted to its radical and uncompromising discourse. It also received wide and generous public media coverage and escaped the arrests, persecution and harassment that visited the

ZCTU. Since its formation, it has organised rival May Day celebrations to counter those of the ZCTU and senior government leaders normally give addresses at its functions. However, though the ZFTU initially succeeded in causing considerable confusion and panic within the ranks of the ZCTU, it still plays second fiddle to the latter.

Other government-created NGOs (GONGOs) include: the Zimbabwe Congress of Students Union (ZICOSU), which stands as a bitter rival to the mainstream Zimbabwe National Students Union (ZINASU), which draws membership from universities and colleges; the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Justice to rival the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR). At the apex there is the Zimbabwe Federation of Non-Governmental Organisations (ZFNGO) to counter the National Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (NANGO), which is the umbrella association for mainstream CSOs/NGOs. The ZFNGO ‘houses’ rival CSOs/NGOs.

It is notable that even faith-based organisations exhibit the same tendencies. What this amounts to is that Zimbabwe’s political terrain possesses few institutions with the credibility and capacity to serve as neutral mediators between contending political and social forces.

CSOs and the Dynamics of the Constitutional Process

The GPA-mandated constitution-making process was a strategic moment for those desiring to shape and/or reshape the con-

stitutional architecture of the country. This issue had been at the top of most CSO agendas since the mid-1990s, but when the first attempt at constitutional reform was made in 1999, mainstream civil society boycotted the process, alleging that it was not sufficiently people-driven. The second attempt came in April 2009, following the establishment of the Parliamentary Constitution Select Committee (popularly known as COPAC). The COPAC-led constitution making process saw civil society split with some key CSOs – notably ZCTU and the NCA – condemning participation on the same grounds as in 1999.

In order to avert falling apart, the civil society community allowed its various members to fall into three main categories and approaches:

- *No participation but pressurise for an alternative process* that brings civil society on board
- *No participation but play monitoring and oversight role*, i.e. being a watchdog vis-à-vis political parties (both ZANU-PF and the two MDC factions) and all other participants in the COPAC process, including participating CSOs
- *Fully participate and influence*, for example by joining COPAC committees.

In the end, most mainstream CSOs and all GONGOs participated at varying levels of intensity. The process itself took some four years of polarised, partisan contestation and

hard bargaining to produce a draft constitution in July 2012. Thereafter another round of intense contestation ensued, with the two MDCs quickly endorsing the COPAC draft and ZANU-PF coming up with what amounted to a counter-draft. However, in September 2012, ZANU-PF finally conceded, allowing an unchanged COPAC draft constitution to proceed to the next stage. Ultimately, the GNU leaders agreed on the draft in January 2013 and set a tight deadline of 16 March 2013 for the referendum. Some CSOs – notably the NCA and the concerned affiliates of the ZCTU – condemned the hurried referendum process, with the NCA unsuccessfully taking the government to court, seeking a postponement of the referendum.

A critical juncture in Zimbabwe's political history was the enactment of the new Constitution in May 2013, after a popular and peaceful referendum that overwhelmingly endorsed the draft in March 2013. Most observers (domestic and foreign) endorsed the referendum as free, fair and credible, but some had misgivings about the unexpectedly large turnout. Up to 95 per cent of the three million-plus voters endorsed the draft in what was described as the highest voter turnout since the independence elections of 1980. This was largely attributable to the cross-party consensus around the 'Yes' campaign and also to the easier and relaxed voting requirements whereby anyone over 18 years of age and with a national ID could vote; the voters roll was not used, as was the case in 1980.

Nonetheless, some CSOs feared that there had been rigging in favour of the 'Yes' vote: the Election Support Centre (ESC), for instance, speculated that 'the referendum could have been rigged and the high turnout was manipulated through ballot staffing [sic]' (2013). The rigging thesis is given some credence in the context of a potentially large electorate that was not particularly knowledgeable about the draft constitution and/or had not even seen it. Apparently, although the ZEC printed as many as 12 million ballot papers (almost the total population of Zimbabwe and twice the number of registered voters), it had printed only 70,000 copies of the draft constitution for distribution to the whole country. Clearly, this was fodder for fears and rumours of ballot-stuffing.

This was the first time in Zimbabwe's modern history that the people had been actively involved in crafting their own constitution. The new social contract is by all accounts a vast improvement on the old constitution, especially on citizen rights (Chapter 4, the Declaration of Rights). Regrettably, the new constitution was soon overshadowed by another critical juncture, the elections of July 2013.

CSOs in the Coalition Government

Historically, even back in the settler colonial period, relations between the state and governance-oriented civil society were rarely cordial. Tension and even hostile confrontation were its hallmarks. To be able to properly grasp CSO–Government relations

during the GNU requires stepping back to the formation of the MDC and MDC–CSO relations thereafter.

The most significant fact about the MDC is that it was mothered by a disparate conglomeration of civic organisations whose shared consensus was improving Zimbabwe’s governance. This defined their future relationship and that with the ZANU-PF controlled Government. From the very beginning, civil society and the MDC were inextricably linked and consequently viewed as ‘enemies of the state’ by ZANU-PF. In short, there was a consistent confrontational relationship between civil society–MDC and ZANU-PF– Government.

By embedding itself in opposition politics, civil society placed itself in an invidious position when the MDC formed a coalition government with ZANU-PF. The dilemma was how to treat the GNU, whose composition now included its own offspring? The temptation among the majority of CSOs was to support the MDC side in the implementation of the GNU. This close proximity also cost civil society considerable credibility and laid it open to legitimate accusations of lack of objectivity in its role as a watchdog. It inevitably found itself in an unusual and highly compromised position, which in no small way contributed to serious fractures and tensions within its ranks. Emblematic was the rift over the constitution-making process, with key organisations such as the NCA, ZCTU and ZINASU vehemently opposed to a leading role for Parliament through

COPAC. Though a minority among CSOs, they argued that the process of crafting the new constitution was insufficiently ‘people-driven’. By contrast, recognising that constitution reform required political power and technical expertise, other Zimbabwean CSOs and NGOs participated in events sponsored by Parliament.

The divisions in civil society around the constitution-making exercise remained unhealed at election day, with the NCA becoming viscerally critical of the process and ultimately a sworn enemy of the MDC-T. To this extent, the GNU was very costly to civil society as a collective community with shared governance goals. Nonetheless, civil society had important roles to play in monitoring the implementation of the GPA and any donor benchmarks for re-engagement, as well as for preparing the ground for a free and fair election (voter registration and education, tracking press freedom, election observation using international standards and parallel vote tabulation, for example).

The bottom line is that CSOs could have played a more critical role in the special circumstances of the GNU, where all the three parties that had won seats in the March 2008 elections were actively involved in the coalition government. Theoretically, there was no official opposition to the government in power. For example, the Seventh Parliament (2008–2013) had no opposition benches or opposition leader(s). This was a big gap that an alert and robust civil society could have handily filled, but most were

handicapped by their past (and continuing) ties to the two MDC parties and their policy stances were often informed by cues from the parties. Compounding the matter was that more than a few CSO leaders had their eyes on future government positions in the event of the one or other of the MDCs (especially the MDC-T) winning the elections. Not surprisingly, then, few wanted to damage their future political prospects by assuming the role of an open and confrontational professional watchdog.

Zimbabwe, CSOs and the post-2013 Dynamic Transition

The working thesis of this paper is that present-day Zimbabwe is now locked in a transition far deeper, wider and seemingly more irreversible than ever before. It can be stated with considerable confidence that a new dawn is nigh in Zimbabwe, occasioned by both macro- (national), and micro-level changes. The former refers to the two mega processes of 2013 and the latter largely to the internal changes in both the ruling ZANU-PF and opposition parties. Civil society has had to adjust its work to this new and dynamic environment.

In 2002, a KAF publication (Mair and Sithole 2002) described Zimbabwe as a 'blocked transition'. This was despite the fact that one of the co-authors, the late Professor Masipula Sithole, had five years earlier (1997) enthusiastically declared that Zimbabwe was witnessing 'eroding authoritarianism'; it proved to be a premature declaration. Twelve years after that

publication, one can discern green shoots emerging from the blocked transition. In fact, a *dynamic* transition is underway.

This is evident in many respects. For instance, in terms of constitutional development, the country is undergoing a transition – albeit a reluctant one given the slow pace in the institutionalisation and implementation of the 2013 supreme law. ZANU-PF and the MDC-T are also undergoing painful and potentially violent leadership transitions, these being more debilitating for ZANU-PF. In terms of the economy, there is also a structural transition from a formal to an informal economy (accompanied by a decline in the quality of jobs), one in which Zimbabweans are now fearing deflation rather than hyperinflation, as was the case in pre-GNU Zimbabwe. On the diplomatic front, relations between Zimbabwe and the international community in the West frosty for more than a decade, are less frosty, evidence of a transition dynamic. Last, but by no means least, civil society is in a grand transition of its very own, shifting the way it conducts its business, especially in the drive away from confronting to co-operating with the state and government.

Transition is in the air, even if it is not always visible to the naked eye, and its dynamism explains why many Zimbabweans are so uncertain about their future and that of their country. This is not unusual, for uncertainty, both in process and outcome, lies at the heart of any transition. For instance, it is not certain whether the

leadership transition in ZANU-PF will follow a democratic or a more authoritarian trajectory; that is a big unknown. This is the part of the larger context and terrain for civil society.

A clear and present mood in the civil society leadership in post-election Zimbabwe is that the sector needs a new and expanded role. The language of socioeconomic rights and activities is in the air. One of the most common terms now used to describe this new expanded role is 'relevance'. There is a palpable and pervasive sense that civil society has rediscovered its relevance, which presumably was the missing link in its activities in the recent past.

Most donor-funded organisations were crestfallen after the election results, forcing most of them into near-meditation, reflecting on what went wrong, at the end of which they seemingly discovered the new formula. This entailed reconnecting with communities in a 'relevant' way by engaging with and addressing communities' 'basic' needs and concerns. The new wind of change had thus reached civil society. Though rarely explicitly mentioned, there is a belated recognition of a changed and changing political economy that civil society had neither identified nor understood and that there is need to respond to it in new ways. There is what amounts to a belated admission by civil society that it had somehow got lost on the journey to the harmonised elections of 2013.

Former EU Ambassador Dell'Arricia's controversially but accurately captured the

changing paradigm governing civil society. Remarks made in his address to a civil society gathering in June 2014 provoked a sharp and almost hysteric outcry and rebuke from Zimbabwe civics, especially those in the Diaspora, with some even demanding that he be recalled by the European Union (Mathuthu 2014). And yet, in reality, far from trying to instigate a new paradigm, Dell'Arricia was merely articulating what was already happening on the ground. By early 2014, most local CSOs were already 'engaging' with the new post-election ZANU-PF government, even if they did not endorse the electoral process that had produced it. Unmistakeably, a new mood was in the air and it was one of pragmatism (*kushanda nezviripo*, literally meaning 'working with what is there').

The new paradigm has several related facets, the first of which involves engagement in a dual direction: upward engagement with the Government and downwards engagement to grassroots level through community-based organisations (CBOs). As a sector of civil society, CBOs had been neglected during the last decade or so. There is also the increasingly felt need to engage horizontally through co-ordinated and co-operative action.

The second facet is a reassessment of the relationship of CSOs with political parties, especially those that are in opposition to the ruling party. As noted earlier, the previous relationship between civil society and the opposition was like that of Siamese twins. The heavy and embarrassing defeat

of the two MDCs in the July 2013 elections necessitated a critical review of the value of such an intimate relationship, with many CSOs subsequently advocating an arm's-length relationship with political parties in general. This meant maintaining a healthy distance from partisan politics and their organisations.

A third aspect of the new paradigm is a broader perspective on building capacity. This entails going beyond improving mere technical or administrative competencies (budgeting, accounting, reporting, crafting organisational policies and so on) to more expansive capacity building that includes strengthening CSO competencies to develop and deliver programmes on the basis of the prevailing political and socioeconomic conditions. Another capacity deficit area that constrained the effectiveness of CSOs was the ability to undertake research (or utilise that done by others) and critically analyse the political landscape, the events taking place within it, the actors involved and their motives and work the findings into policy formulation, programme development and implementation. In short, there is a compelling need to move towards an evidence-based approach to programming.

There is yet another debilitating issue afflicting civics and NGOs generally. A serious and almost ubiquitous problem that strikes a nerve among CSOs concerns internal governance, whether as individual entities or as networks of like-minded organisations. In terms of the latter, a number of CSOs claim to act as networks.

However, hardly any such networks actually work as such. The lead organisation or hub of the so-called network is in fact a fully fledged, independent entity in its own right, with a Secretariat and Executive Director (ED) that brook little or no interference from other organisations. Far from playing a facilitating role, the hub competes with its member organisations in programme delivery and hence funding as well. Further, each of the formal network member organisations jealously guards its autonomy and 'organisational sovereignty'.⁶ One of the cardinal flaws of civil society in the past had to do with this lack of co-operation and co-ordination. More often than not, there was more competition – especially for funding and recognition from donors, sometimes the same one – than co-operation and collaboration. As a consequence, there was an unnecessary duplication of activities in a given sector or sub-sector, and sometimes in the same geographical area, a typical example of there being too many cooks in the kitchen.

At the organisational level, more serious problems of internal governance stuck out (and still do) like a sore thumb. With few exceptions, most governance and human rights CSOs are registered as 'Trusts' at the High Court, and invariably the Deed of Trust (the organisation's constitution) has

⁶ I coined this term in 'Zimbabwe at the crossroads: Challenges for civil society', and used it in reference to 'oversensitivity to organisational turf and the felt need to defend such territory'. See http://www.osisa.org/sites/default/files/sup_files/Zimbabwe%20at%20the%20crossroads.pdf.

two governance organs: the Board of Trustees that makes policy and the Secretariat, under an ED, that implements policy. Yet this is only the legal and formal structure; the empirical reality is often vastly different from the juridical position, for the relationship between the Board and the Secretariat is typically inverted. The ED – usually the founder of the organisation – makes and implements policy that the Board rubber-stamps at its meetings, which are held about three times a year. The founder does not only ‘own’ the organisation but is also its life director and accountable only to himself/herself.⁷ If s/he is externally accountable, it is to the donor rather than the Board or the organisation’s constituency. One of our interlocutors described this situation as one of having a donor but no constituency. In fact, the governance deficits that CSOs consistently accuse the Government of committing equally afflict them, namely poor or non-existing accountability and a lack of transparency and responsiveness. Donors, on their side, seldom cast a sharp eye at the internal institutional governance of the organisations they support, preferring to strengthen the technical and administrative aspects. As already noted, and sadly so, most CSOs take offence when it is pointed out.

The overarching challenge for past, present and future civil society is promoting the democratisation of national governance. The opinion herein is that this could

⁷ Critics of this phenomenon have referred to such organisations as ‘MOOs’ (My Own Organisation).

best be done by helping with the formation of a critical mass of citizens beyond voters; more about this below. In the last 15 years, and especially towards the elections held in 2000, 2002, 2005, 2008 and 2013, many 3G organisations, with active support and funding from donors, all-but stampeded to create a critical mass of voters. Recent discussions with the leaderships of numerous CSOs revealed that many had participated in elections-related work, often as an appendage to their traditional mandate, in order to capture the financial booty that came through supporting donors. This reached epidemic proportions in the run-up to the 2013 elections. The pervasive fad was voter mobilisation (voter registration), with a distinct bias towards urban areas. For instance, in 2012, a loose coalition of youth organisations came together and formed the First Time Voters Campaign, which focused on getting young people (18-35 years) to register as voters and then to vote. In the same year, a related coalition started the ‘X1G Campaign’ that also targeted the youth, this time using urban culture to increase voter turnout in urban areas. Organisations that participated in this campaign claim that it was successful in that some youth did make the effort to vote in the 2013 elections.

Most of these activities took the project rather than programme approach and were therefore treated as short-term interventions of a six-month duration or less. Many CSO leaders acknowledge, with regret, that they only started such interventions after

the March 2013 referendum, and some only after the election date was declared – unilaterally – in May 2013. As such, most of the activities were in the form of rapid response actions to quickly fill existing gaps in the election phase of the election cycle. Usually, such interventions were only made because there was funding for them and, like bees, CSOs went to the source of the nectar. Once the elections were over, donor funding shrank or even dried up and many partner organisations that had gone into election programming found themselves in a crippling or terminal financial crisis. The project approaches, and the associated short-termism, are now acknowledged by many CSOs as a major flaw. Having had their fingers burnt, many now advocate long-term programmes that are closely aligned to the elections cycle approach. While this would be a significant improvement, the focus would still be narrow, being on the voter (and the elections infrastructure generally) rather than the more expansive aim of developing the citizen.

CSOs and Sustainability

With the exception of the State-sponsored family of CSOs, most mainstream organisations are wholly dependent on foreign donor funding. It is difficult to identify any CSO in the governance and human rights sector that has an independent source, i.e. membership fees, for financing its activities. This has created an asymmetrical relationship between donor and recipient, such that ‘partnership’, the word often

used to describe the relationship, rings rather hollow in practice. The unequal ‘partnership’ often translates into chronic dependence upon the donor or group of donors. As a result, autonomy is severely circumscribed and the organisation has little freedom when it comes to decision-making and action, especially in terms of agenda-setting.

Further, and most humiliating for CSOs, donor priorities frequently shift, forcing the recipient to follow the dollar. As a consequence, the local partner is compelled by the law of necessity to tailor make its programmes and projects to suit those of the funder, even when this might be outside its registered mandate. In short, funding is the Achilles heel of many a CSO.

For various reasons, particularly economic and political, local funding is not a viable option as there are few local donors outside the State. The bottom line is that no CSO – whether foreign or locally funded – can stand on its own two feet, for it cannot generate its own funding from its own activities. To that extent, both groups of CSOs suffer from the same debilitating disease, namely high dependency levels. Further, Zimbabwe, and indeed many African countries, has no tradition of raising or granting funding from endowments. Some CSOs have this provision in their constitution, and even in their strategic plans, but few, if any, ever use this as a source of funding sustainability, knowing they would most likely fail if they tried.

Some civil society organisations define

sustainability in terms of diversifying donor funding in order that the local organisation depends on 'basket funding' rather than one funder alone. Regrettably, this is no path to self-sustainability, because the local partner still has to operate within all funders' parameters and a major disagreement with one could invite collective punishment whereby all withdraw funding. In the final analysis, and for the foreseeable future, local CSOs – whether pro- or anti-regime – will depend almost entirely on donor (foreign or State) funding.

The Way Forward: An Agenda for Action

There is general agreement that civil society remains in a state of flux following the 2013 elections. This arises from some of the unfortunate mistakes, including errors of omission, it made during the previous 15 years. Still, it must be acknowledged that CSOs braved a repressive environment under an intolerant and monopolistic regime and remained vocal and active under the hard authoritarianism that characterised the post-March 2008 election period. And they have great potential, despite being traumatised by the outcome of the most recent elections. The greatest challenge they face is how to channel the right causes in the right way. CSOs must also renegotiate how they work with communities and CBOs and with the Government and other partners.

From voters to citizens: At community level, the challenge is to develop a

democratic citizenry from an assemblage of atomistic voters. This paper's perspective – admittedly contestable – is that in terms of the democratic development of the country, Zimbabweans have acted more as voters than citizens. Only when voters become citizens is there hope for a successful and sustainable democracy. The core argument here is that Zimbabweans (and perhaps other Africans) still have a shallow or underdeveloped sense of citizenship. Hence, the cardinal role of civil society today is to promote the development of citizens out of voters or to deepen citizenship where it already exists. The argument is elaborated below.

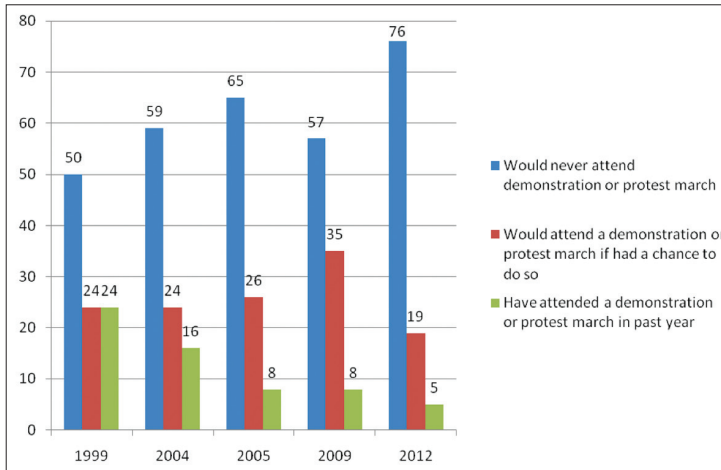
Post-2000, Zimbabweans felt increasingly demobilised, both as individuals and as communities. Due to a convergence of factors, they grew disillusioned, felt powerless and even impotent to make a change.⁸ People disengaged from politics and withdrew from the world of public affairs. In short, they became acquiescent subjects of their political world. Rather than protesting injustices, they were prepared to turn the other cheek. Survey evidence attests to this trend (Figure 1, right). An individualist orientation developed and consolidated itself in a harsh political and economic environment. It was each one to their own and God for all. It was and is inconceivable that democracy can be built on such an atomistic social base. And yet one of the

⁸ As this fatalism grew, there was a correspondent surge in active membership of faith-based prophetic churches, where many sought divine intervention to their problems.

Figure 1: Protest Participation in Zimbabwe, 1999–2012

Question: Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you have personally done any of these during the past year:

Attended a demonstration or a protest march.



Source: Afrobarometer.org surveys for the years indicated.

major interventions of CSOs was focusing on Zimbabweans as voters, equipping them to vote and, not infrequently, ‘advising’ them how to vote ‘wisely’.

Figure 1 clearly reflects the decline in protest action among Zimbabweans, even in the face of rapidly diminishing standards of living between 1999 and 2008. Participation rates dropped sharply and consistently from 24 per cent in 1999 to just 5 per cent in 2012. Likewise, the unwillingness to protest rose steadily, from 50 per cent of the adult population in 1999 to 76 per cent in 2012. The euphoria that initially characterised the response to the formation of the GNU largely accounts for the decline in unwillingness to protest registered in May 2009,

when the survey was carried out. The 2009 survey also indicates a significant but temporary surge in respondents saying they would demonstrate/protest if they had the chance, but it subsequently dropped to an all-time low of 19 per cent in the July 2012 survey.

This picture of a demobilised Zimbabwean is despite the same person continually expressing a fondness for democracy as a form of government (Figures 2 and 3, overleaf). Figure 2 shows that the preference for democracy did hold steady from 1999 to 2012 and that at no time did less than two-thirds of Zimbabweans express this inclination. Further, a more complete picture of the public mood on the state of

Figure 2: Popular Attitudes toward Democracy in Zimbabwe

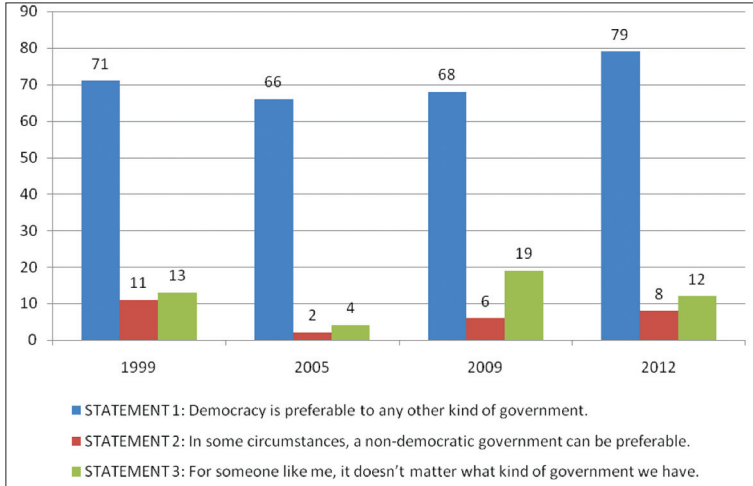


Figure 3: Preferences for Democracy among Zimbabweans

Question: Which of these three statements is closest to your own opinion?

STATEMENT 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.

STATEMENT 2: In some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable.

STATEMENT 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.

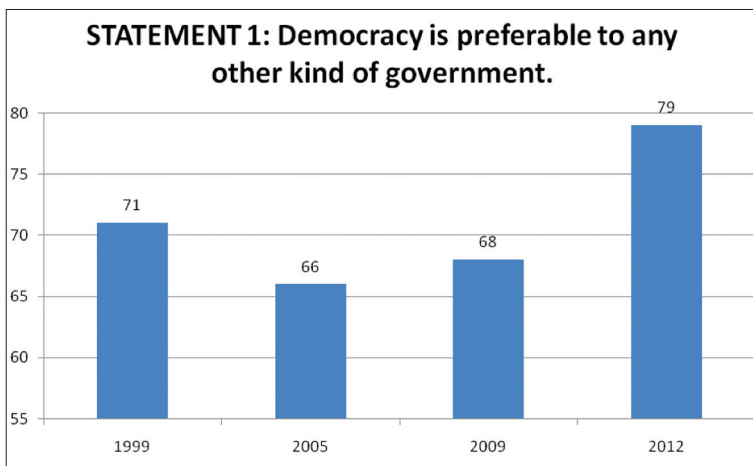
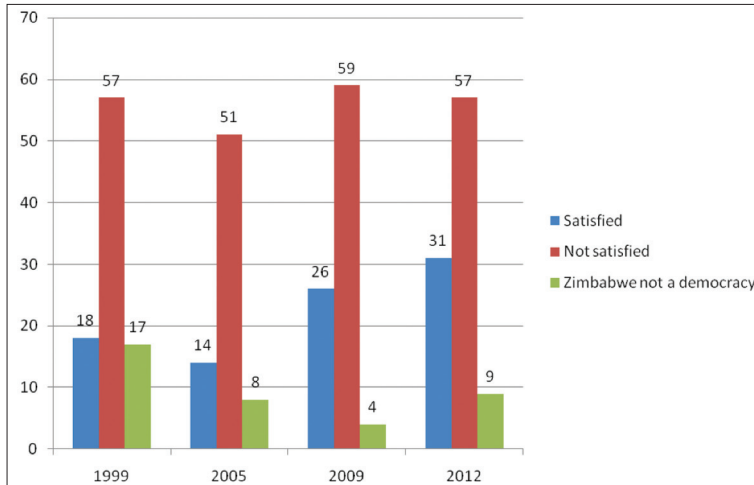


Figure 4: Satisfaction with Democracy



democracy in the country is revealed in Figure 4 (above), which shows that, since 1999, at least half of the electorate said it was dissatisfied with the country's democratic credentials. Figure 3 excludes those Zimbabweans who stated outright that 'Zimbabwe is not a democracy'. This proportion was 9 per cent in 2012, meaning that two-thirds (57 per cent + 9 per cent = 66 per cent) of the populace either dismissed the idea of Zimbabwe being a democracy or were unhappy with the existing state of democracy in the country. This is a damning report card.

The purpose of presenting this data is to demonstrate that Zimbabweans feel they do not have democracy; yearn for it; and feel powerless to fight for it, especially outside the electoral arena. In other words they are aspirational democrats who believe they lack the competency to make their political ideal(s) reality. This could be the entry

point for civil society engagement with the masses, namely helping them with converting these desires into deeds.

Further, it appears that at best, most Zimbabweans define their citizenship largely in terms of being able to vote. This is a highly restrictive view of democracy and is clearly inhospitable ground for democratisation. It is this paper's view that the major challenge facing civil society today is expanding Zimbabweans' sense of self from being voters to full citizens with all the accompanying rights. Is citizen education the bridge that will carry the mass of people from democratic deprivation to democratic gratification?

The paper argues, as do other observers and writers,⁹ that elections do not make a

⁹ See, for instance, contributions in Michael Bratton (2013), especially Chapter 11, and Masunungure (2013).

democracy. Voting is a cyclical political activity that, in Zimbabwe's case, takes place every five years. During the intervening years, voters withdraw, returning to the safety of their cocoon, seemingly oblivious to the external world of public affairs, the need to engage with it and collectively with others. To engage in collective action, *the voter needs to become a citizen*, and this is where the new, expanded role of civil society enters the scene. Here, CSOs need to start small and go local, dealing with issues that matter to the communities with whom they are working. Grassroots concerns tend to supersede issues pertaining to political and civil rights. For example, to a rational peasant in present-day Zimbabwe, the hierarchy of needs will seldom place political rights above the need for adequate food. Indeed, 'abstract' rights make sense and have meaning only when they are tied to those that are more substantive, when there is a demonstrable nexus between the political/civil rights and the belly. It can be asserted that it was the failure of the opposition and its civil society allies to show how the former are linked to or feed into socio-economic rights that stole the glitter from their campaign.

CSOs must reset their relationship with those at grassroots level, ideally via CBOs. These include residents' associations (urban areas), faith-based organisations, women and youth groups (rural and urban), co-operatives and farmers' associations (rural areas). The idea should be to mould an active citizenry that is able to speak truth

to power outside of electoral contests, even on non-political issues that are relevant to the community and to local development. This type of citizen involvement may well be more critical to democratisation than citizen participation at the polls. It could take the form of engaging relevant local authorities regarding the delivery of public goods and services. In order to build and/or strengthen civic orientation vis-à-vis public affairs, CSOs must work with CBOs and communities.

This kind of developmental work is painstaking, requiring the kind of patience that CSOs seemed to have lacked over the last 15 years or so. Delivering democracy cannot be done in a hurry, as CSOs (and donors) have learnt to their cost. It needs to be built from below and it is at best a medium-term process and certainly never a short-run exercise.

Towards engaging the regime and other partners: Civil society can play multiple roles in addressing the challenge of broadening and deepening engagement with Government and other strategic partners. Going forward, one of the issues at the top of the agenda is redefining the role of civil society, as well as their relationship with the government of the day. This demands positive engagement without being co-opted – an ever-present danger. Relations between civil society and government need to be recalibrated given the restoration of de-facto one-party domination in Zimbabwe.

The paper asserts that the role of civil society will be more critical in a Zimbabwe

under one-party hegemony. The decimation of the organised opposition in Zimbabwe has elevated the role of the non-state sector, including, if not especially, institutions of countervailing power. This requires neither confrontation nor capitulation; rather it necessitates positive and mutually beneficial engagement. A gravely wounded and weakened opposition leaves a wide accountability gap that other societal actors have to fill. Civil society can play this role without either becoming an enemy of the state or its lapdog. Will it rise up to the occasion?

In a sense, there is need for a paradigm shift, to do new things in new ways. Carrying on in the same manner will not take anyone anywhere anytime soon. If CSOs do not leave the patterns of the last 15 years behind them, it will signal a refusal to learn from the past, something understandable given the traditional culture and orientation of mainstream CSOs.

It is true that the present CSO leadership was raised in the tradition of being anti-Government and that an effective civil society is one that stands opposed to government on anything and everything regardless of its merits. It was honourable to be ideologically opposed to government and dishonourable to be supportive. Given their 'upbringing', such CSOs might find it difficult to open lines of communication with Government, but there is no viable alternative. Moreover, it is not necessary to become a lapdog in order to agree with ZANU-PF on certain national policies that are of national interest, for example land

reform and youth or women empowerment, even if they have different opinions as to the most appropriate models and methodologies. In other words, civil society should find it possible to praise a policy where and/or when appropriate and vice versa. Opposing government cannot be raised to the level of ideology; that borders on doctrinaire anachronism.

However, any engagement needs to be targeted. For instance, media organisations should target the relevant government ministry/department and/or the applicable Parliamentary Portfolio Committee. CSOs thus need to identify a niche issue area and anchor themselves in it. Those CSOs around the globe that are most effective are issue-oriented and do not try to spread themselves over multiple issue areas. There is no point in trying to be a jack of all trades. Being issue-focused may in fact explain the relative effectiveness of a few local CSOs, such as the NCA (before its transformation into a political party), which succeeded in compelling government to respond to its agitation for a new constitution in the late 1990s.

Civil society engagement also needs to be broadened while still remaining focused. Government should not be the only object of its attentions. There is considerable unharnessed scope for working with the private sector where it is supportive of a specific issue. In fact, it should be feasible to have issue-based policy communities comprising government, civil society, private sector and other cognate partners.

Conclusions: Is the Glass Half Full or Half Empty?

The paper ends on a subdued yet nevertheless optimistic note. By the standards of most other African countries except South Africa, Zimbabwe's civil society is robust. It is a heterogeneous community, thematically spread across the spectrum of humanitarian charities and CBOs to developmental NGOs and governance-oriented civic associations. Granted, after the shock of the July 2013 elections, civil society is presently disoriented, fragmented and feeling degraded. It is battling to find its place in a context where its long-time strategic partner – the MDC – is almost on its knees and battling serious internal convulsions. These two pillars – civic society and the opposition movement – are at the weakest they have been since the late 1990s, though the former is gradually showing signs of recovery and, after deep introspection, seem to be finding a new path out of the woods.

From the 1990s onward, civil society has had to operate in a harsh authoritarian state. Although it fought valiantly, it misdirected itself – or was misdirected – into thinking it could democratise the country from above, and on its own, by targeting the repressive regime and taking the stance that the more confrontational and uncompromising it was, the more effective it would be. It also misdirected itself in another important sense, namely by choosing to be embedded with the opposition as if there was something inherently saintly about opposition parties and something intrinsically evil

about the ruling party. This myth exploded during the GNU period, a situation that placed CSOs in a highly invidious and often embarrassing position when the MDC proved 'too ZANU-PF' in its conduct. In both contexts, CSOs acted without a critical mass of civic-minded citizens. It also chose the narrow, easier and short-term strategy of developing voters rather than taking the broader, more arduous and long-term goal of cultivating a citizenry that could then engage – together with others and perhaps under CSO leadership – with the long-term democratising project.

Happily, civil society has recognised the need for a new way of doing things and is re-strategising with a view to undertaking broader re-engagement, vertically and also horizontally, with other CSOs. In doing so, civil society will become part of the dynamic and comprehensive transition unfolding in Zimbabwe, one which seems to portend the end of an old order and the birth of new era. In this process, a reconfigured civil society has a salutary role to play and a stock of lessons learnt that it can use to guide its future programming. It is on this basis that this paper concludes that the glass is half full.

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