

Definition of CSOs

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The Future of Civil Society Development Organisations

Civil Society

... there has been a kind of uncritical glorification of the concept of civil society so much so that it has become almost a realm of consensus.

Surprising it may seem, several groups such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), global funding agencies, institutions of state, trade unions, religious organisations, social movements and left intellectuals share a common ground in their glorification of civil society, almost uncritically ...

INTRAC's working definition of civil society

In its adopted working definition of civil society, INTRAC refers to '... associations that exist outside of the state or market **which maintain a degree of autonomy and independence** and have the potential to provide alternative views, policies and actions to those promoted by the state and market.' At the same time as offering its own definition of civil society, INTRAC recognises that as a concept it is open to a broad spectrum of interpretations by different sectors and organisations.

INTRAC's working definition of civil society

The power relations that exist between the state, market and civil society are fluid and dynamic. There is a spectrum through which civil society engages with the state, from an **oppositional role** through to a **complementing** the state role and even **supplementing** the state by filling gaps the state is no longer able to provide for through service delivery.

INTRAC's working definition of civil society

INTRAC believes civil society goes beyond the important realm of formally registered organisations. It recognises in addition that there are more **transitory expressions of organisation** around a particular momentary issue like women who gather around water wells as well as identity-based groups such as clans.

Working Definition NGO

A non-governmental organisation (NGO) is a formalised, non-profit group which has been created outside of government to address particular issues, tasks or functions of a non-commercial nature. Such groups may be organised at a local, national or international level. They are dedicated to serving a particular function and are driven by people with a common interest in addressing these issues.

Working Definition NGO

NGOs perform a variety of service and humanitarian **functions**. These can include lobbying for particular causes, advocating and monitoring government policies and encouraging political participation through the provision of information. Some are organised around specific issues, such as human rights, animal rights, environment or health. They provide analysis and expertise, serve as early warning mechanisms and help to monitor and implement international agreements.

Rhetoric of Social Movements

Too many social norms change too often for it all to be attributed to official strategic groups looking for change. Only when this holistic approach is taken towards movement studies will there really be what we are looking for inside the field, the ability to acquire knowledge that will help us evaluate current movements actions and their effectiveness with more accuracy than ever before.

Context

Current context in CSOs operate:

- Diminishing spaces for autonomous and independent civil society initiatives and activities.
- A failure of various political processes.

Gramsci

Many analysts and civil society actors would agree that the dominant economic model is **not sustainable**, and would consider the major cause of environmental degradation to be linked with economic systems that exploit and misuse nature and people. However from a Gramscian perspective, those promoting this model of development can only do so with the **tacit consent** of civil society in order to continue promoting it.

Gramsci?

Gramsci explained civil society as the domain for creating ideology, for building consensus and for legitimizing power, that is, for creating and maintaining the cultural and social hegemony of the dominant group through **consent** rather than **coercion**.

Habermas

Habermas elsewhere noted that alongside or in place of class conflicts other conflicts animated by new social movements that centre upon the **quality of life, human rights, ecological issues, gender equality** and for **participation in social decision making**, have appeared.

Partial list of social action movements

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Animal rights movement	Anti-consumerism	Anti-war movement
Anti-globalization movement	Black Consciousness Movement	Brahma Samaj Movement
Charismatic movement	Civil rights movement	Conservation movement
Counter-culture movement	Co-operative movement	Cultural movement
Disability rights movement	Ecology movement (Environmental movement)	Environmental Movement
Ecofeminism	Environmental Justice movement	Free love
Fair Trade movement	Free software movement	Indigenous peoples movement
Global justice movement	Human rights movement	The landless workers' movement
Labor movement	Landless Peoples Movement	Right to Life
Non-cooperation movement	Narmada Bacho Andolan	Women's liberation movement
Student movement	Squatting movement	
Prohibition or Temperance Movement	Women's suffrage movement	
Treatment Action Campaign - movement struggling for HIV/AIDS treatment		
Neurodiversity movement advocating for the right of people who are considered neurally divergent		
LGBT social movements (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender social movements)		

K.M.SEETHI

Globalisation and its accompanying economic 'reforms' have had a huge impact on people's lives all over the globe. The implications of the "neoliberal" globalisation for human rights are much more visible today if we broaden our understanding of human rights beyond civil and political rights to include **economic, social and cultural rights**.

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The developments over the past two decades have revealed that globalisation and dominant economic models constitute a direct threat to human rights in several countries... effectively undermining social welfare systems, increased poverty and deprived the majority of the world's people from their **basic economic right to a decent living.**

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Various transnational agencies and states have placed 'rights' of global capital above people's rights to make a living. Obviously, the **present tempo of proliferation of civil society groups and organizations is linked with the purposeful retreat of the welfare state**, resulting in the compromise of basic human rights enshrined in international conventions.

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The upshot of the argument is that civil society has now become a comfortable referent to a variety of complex formations, associations, movements and voluntary groups which serve as **buffers** between the state and citizen, not just a surrogate for the social functions/responsibilities of the former.

Global Civil Society

According to some scholars and activists, the emerging global civil society represents a forceful and promising response to the 'democratic deficit' that has been one of the most problematic aspects of the globalisation process hitherto.

Global Civil Society

To put it simply, two contradictory views have been put forward.

Global Civil Society

One is that the increasing importance of NGOs globally, and the policy/governance networks they are part of, represent a project through which political and economic elites, hungry for democratic legitimacy, compete in their attempts to colonise actual and potential spaces of popular participation.

Global Civil Society

The most striking examples given are related to the aid industry, where NGOs channel private or government funding, which arrives with particular conditions that impose certain (Western) values on the receiving context.

Global Civil Society

*This is in contradistinction to the second view, which sees global civil society as representing **grassroot self-organisation** of social spaces which have been colonised by the practices either of technocratic administrations or of private corporations (or an alliance of the two, promoted under the rhetoric of ‘good governance’).*

Global Civil Society

*Civic actors are here seen as potential carriers of **democratic learning processes** (widening the meaning and practice of democracy), initiators of public debates – through which **marginalised issues and social groups are made visible globally** – and guardians of human rights in relation to states and other powerful organisations, such as transnational corporations.*

Functions of Advocacy Groups

Today, advocacy groups contribute to democracy in many ways. They have five key functions:

- Give a voice to (misrepresented) citizen interests
- Mobilize citizens to participate in the democratic process
- Support the development of a culture of democracy
- Assist in the development of better public policy
- Ensure governments' accountability to citizens.

Which is the right path?

Advising the victims to adjust with the sick society or changing the system to adjust to the needs of the members.

Alternatives?

We are presented with a challenge to be part of the creation of real and practical alternative politics ... alternatives that should also seek the transformation of the logic of consumption pattern and of contemporary lifestyle, looking for the adoption of a new long-term perspective different from the current dominant models