

Leadership, Civil Society and Democratisation in Tanzania

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Policy Brief

1. Introduction

This study deals with issues of democratic transformations and the role of civil society by examining the leadership and organisational aspects of two civil society organisations in Tanzania, namely, the Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP) and the Association of Journalists and Media Workers (AJM). Both of these organisations emerged in the period after the introduction of the multiparty political system. Within this context, the study attempted a redefinition of the concept "civil society," given the conceptual confusion prevailing among both academic and development practitioners.

2. Civil Society

Civil society as a concept began to circulate in Tanzania in the early 1980s. It generally embraced social and political movements and the whole question of emancipation of the people from the non-responsive and oppressive states. It was accompanied with popular democratic opposition to Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which were eroding the public provisioning of social and economic services through liberalisation of the economies and the privatisation of public enterprises. These broad democratic struggles were derailed in the late 1980s, by reducing the whole question of democracy to multipartyism and the

existence of a pluralist system, which would transform the state into some form of an intermediary network through which competing groups could influence policy and decision-making. Henceforth, the civil society/state relationship discourse was radically transformed to one that supported liberalisation and the operation of market forces. The World Bank and the IMP promoted a conception of civil society, which was re-conceptualised in terms of the existence of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

As a consequence of this transformation in conception, there emerged a blind espousing of the "civil society" based on certain forms of falsified populist historiography, which went as far as claiming that at independence Tanzania had inherited a multiparty political system with an independent parliament and an autonomous vibrant civil society, such as the workers' unions and peasants' co-operatives, "tribal" /citizens associations, mutual benefit associations, cultural associations, etc. Often, the tong list related to those formal corporate organisations that were formally recognised by the colonial state, rather than other African associational forms that were the anchorage of resistance-based *movements*. This, historiography further claimed that it was the independence government that abolished or brought into control the independent civil society organisations under the pretext of a 'nation building' project.

The study demonstrates that such a view merely works to morally rehabilitate colonialism by ignoring the relationship between the state and the economy and presenting a one-sided history of the emergence and evolution of those "civil society" organisations. Through a reconstruction of processes, the study demonstrates that the colonial agents were in fact very instrumental in the formation of co-operative societies, the African and "tribal" associations (elitist or affluent-based), and many other "modern" forms of organisation, except for the trade unions (which more often than not worked against colonialism given the structural position of the workers in the colonial economy). This was because many of those associations and societies worked for the interests of the colonial economy: they did not necessarily contradict colonialism. It is true that the independent government set it out to control the trade union.

In other words, most institutions that are so much espoused by current literature to the extent of morally rehabilitating colonialism (by claiming that there was a more vibrant "civil society" during its reign) were not necessarily an affirmation of exercise of freedom by civil social forces. Most of these were a consequence of explosion of economic activities around self-interests. They were apolitical by nature, empty of popular participation and often organised as corporate-legal bodies reproducing the rule of law or the colonial forms of capitalist production. There are even instances of reported

corruption in the leadership of some of these organisations.

Contrary to the claims of attempts to abolish them, evidence shows that the post-colonial state supported the development of the co-operative movements. It even attempted to lend them more support soon after independence. Just as in the colonial period, when these institutions were seen as self-sustaining civil organisations founded on the philosophy of Indirect Rule (thus more or less as an extension of the state), the same was true with the post-colonial period. These movements which had expanded rapidly in the 1950s, expanded even faster in the 1960s. In the latter years, it was due to compulsion. The government made a decision in 1961 that co-operatives should be established in the whole country. When the co-operative societies and unions were dissolved in 1975 with the introduction of development and Ujamaa villages, villages were more or less transformed into generic primary co-operatives, taking over the functions of the former.

The so-called "tribal" or citizens' unions had concerned themselves with issues of development/improvement and general issues of chieftaincy (the basis of Indirect Rule), and were more or less the base of support for the nationalist party, Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), in the 1950s. The rural elite (rich export-crops producers) and the town-based urban petty bourgeoisie

basically led these. Like the co-operative movements, many of these enjoyed support, from the colonial government, since they identified development mainly in terms of provision and possession of formal education, and were even sponsoring a few select ones to go for education. Their role became obsolete after independence, since the government abolished chieftaincy (by 1963), and started to centralise and bureaucratise the state. Moreover, the state took over the role of providing social and economic services.

The target of these "tribal unions"---the native authorities and chiefs---had disappeared. Since they contested for the same tribal space, but at the same time more or less in alliance with TANU, it was inevitable that they had to go. This is because their activities were increasingly being co-opted by the central government, expressed in the form of "national unity" as direct rule, which was a continuation of the colonial system of provinces (by independence re-categorised into regions) and districts. The post-independence government took over the provision of African education, health and other social and economic services, areas that were the main domain of missionaries and the local authorities. Such moves had definite implications for "civil societies" involved in those areas. Associations that seem to have continued operating unhindered, although in a more privatised form, were those such as clans, lineages, age groups, communal labour groups, informal credit groups (*upatu*) and dance

societies. These were non-formal associations, which are not considered by most studies on civil society.

It is in this regard that one can make sense of the fact that NGOs have been accepted by the government as an important "sector" of the economy and society. The government has accepted that they have an important role for social and economic development and also nation building and national development, since they contribute to the GDP. NGOs are, accordingly, partners in development if an enabling environment is put in place for them to operate and thrive, and thus' collaboration between them and the government needs to be strengthened. There are even ministries in place to co-ordinate their activities. Recognising them as important in lobbying, advocacy, human rights and provision of social services, the government intends to set aside for them development budget for which they will be accountable to it, besides exempting them from tax and import duties. It defines an NGO as "a voluntary grouping of individuals or organisations which is autonomous, non-political and not-for-profit sharing; organised locally at the grassroots level, nationally or internationally for the purpose of enhancing the legitimate economic, social and/or cultural development or lobbying or advocating on issues of public interest of a group of individuals or organisations." The definition excludes trade unions, political parties or religious/faith organisations.

3. The Role of the TGNP and AJM in Civil Society

As far as the empirical cases are concerned, what is revealed is the fact that TGNP is an activist organization while AJM has confined itself to professional matters. Their difference lies in the fact that the former is involved in lobbying, advocacy and defense of broader interests of marginalised sections of the population within a gender approach, and the latter is involved in lobbying and defending sectional interests within the context of broader interests of the various freedoms. Thus TGNP has a vision and a mission, while AIM does not have these. Not only that, TGNP's activities have been directed towards social change and defense and promotion of civil needs and rights, while AIM has tended to display' most of the conservative elements of the professional associations that tend to only challenge the arbitrary actions of the state in so far as they directly impinge upon them. AJM has not yet developed as a lobbying syndicate for the society in general and, if anything, it still expects society to defend it. Still, under the circumstances, as a professional body, AJM is an improvement to those NGOs that have tended to be apolitical and more often than not play a' supportive role to the government.

TGNP's activities are geared towards tendencies that are characteristic of *social movements* rather than NGOs or even simple pressure groups. Its advocacy and lobbying on equity, equality and democratic issues do not fit in the

"non-political" category as such. Besides having a mission and a vision with a clear philosophy, TGNP has a solid leadership (which has high intellectual qualities) and a committed full time secretariat, which is supported by a board of members and associate members through committees in fulfilling the organisation's mandate. These are essentially *radical activists* with a passion in practical activism. The quality of its membership is the overriding factor more than the question of the size (quantity) of its membership. .

Transparency, accountability, flexibility and a participatory approach in both programmes and administration have been the core attributes of TGNP's life. It has also engaged itself in self-evaluation, re-examination of its activities, plans and activities periodically. Organisationally, the Annual General Meeting (incorporating even members of other organisations in its networks) is the highest decision-making forum. With AIM, as a professional association, its leadership displays a corporate character, whereby there is a patron in the form of a highly placed personage, an executive committee and directorates (Finance and Planning; Information and Foreign Affairs; Training and Development; Legal, Ethics and Discipline; and Welfare). There are no committees such as those for lobbying and advocacy, human rights, press freedom and freedom of information, policy formulation, etc. It is within this organisational form that the limits of the organisation as

far as social transformations are concerned are exhibited. As a result, there have been problems of leadership (including corruption) now and then. More often than not, it is not those who are really committed to the ideals of democracy and transformation who have held office (such as those journalists who have been at the forefront of trying to inform the society and being critical on the state). Rather, the ones who have held office have been those who for various reasons may have found it prestigious to be in the leadership, or those who were attracted to donor funding for the organisation (i.e., they gained office for opportunistic reasons). The extent to which democracy is practised within the organisation is also questionable.

AIM has lost sight of the fact that the real stakeholders of their activities are the people. What is ignored by this organisation is the fact that the strongest influence as far as the media is concerned is the consumer-the reader, the listener, the viewer. It is these who wield power over the contents and survival of media organs. In this regard, as a general principle the media is not supposed to operate under a special regime of law but should as far as possible stand before the law in the same way as any other institution or organisation or citizen. It is the people who are the real stakeholders---the consumers of the media products. In this regard, if the organisation, beyond defending its members' rights, were to consider the problem of accessibility to information and the right of all citizens to be informed and to inform correctly as the

major issue at stake, then the organisation would have incorporated a broader vision of democratisation.

If one follows this historical mapping both theoretically and empirically, then the associations and organisations which make sense for "civil society" are those that deal with the current problems facing democratic transitions in Africa and the broader issues of restructuring social and political relations, rather than those which seek to reinforce the existing relations. Most NGOs, as demonstrated by this study, are not civil society organisations since they have tended to be controlled or co-opted by governments and international agencies, rather than defending the interests of the majority of the people and promoting civil liberties and social transformation.