

Civil Society in Africa: Concept and Features

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Outline

- The concept of civil society
- Features
- The changing scope
 - Globalised CS, focus on democracy
- Examples of CS in Africa
 - Basic forms of CS
 - Issue- or sector-focused NGOs?

Civil Society is a.k.a...

- Third sector
- Non-profit sector
- Voluntary sector
- Informal sector
- Charitable sector
- Independent sector



- Citizens
- Associations

Civil society is a “set of diverse non-governmental institutions, strong enough to counterbalance the state, and, whilst not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent the state from dominating and atomizing the rest of society” (Gellner 1995, 32)

- o De Tocqueville's positivist argument “in favour of civil society”

“‘Civil society’ refers to the ensemble of intermediate organizations that lie between the state and the household, that are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect and advance their interests and values, and that are separate from the state and largely autonomous.” (Gyimah-Boadi 1996)

The Concept of Civil Society

- All voluntary, non-state, social organisations?



Can we speak of Civil Society in Africa? (Lewis 2002)

1. YES (Prescriptive Universalism)

- Individuals and associations in decision-making

2. NO (Western Exceptionalism)

- “Made-to-order” concept for Western society politics
- Mozambique example

3. MAYBE (Adaptive Prescription)

- Activities, not just organisations, self-help groups
- Nigeria example

4. WRONG QUESTION!

"Civil Society" in Africa?

- debate on the relevance and meaning of the term to African society continues
- previous definitions sometimes seen as either ethnocentric or historically insensitive
- CS in Africa has evolved dramatically

(Gough and Yankson 2001)

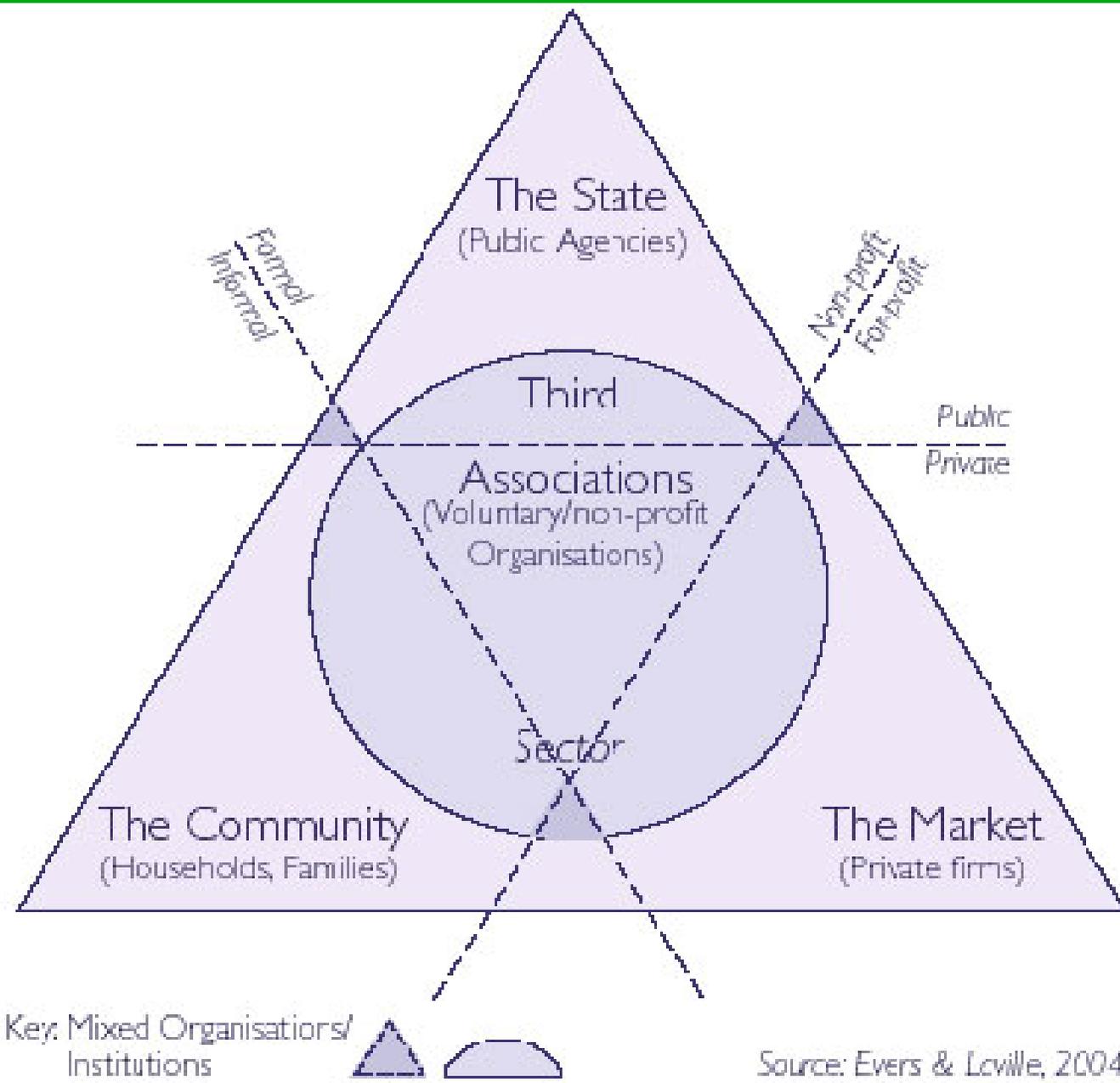
- from a lively sphere in pre-colonial times
- to stifled sector during the colonial years
- to the active and diverse sector we see today

Makumbe 1998

- trade unions
- professional associations
- church organizations
- resident, student, business and other special interest associations
- the media
- various types of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

Aína 1997

- The sphere of social interaction that comprises:
 - intimate sphere (family)
 - associational life, social movements, and forms of public communication
 - operating in the arena of the organised non-state, non-market sector
 - with origins in both the modern and traditional bases of society



CS Institutions in Africa

(Bratton 1994)

CS as “a sphere of social interaction between the household and the state which is manifest in norms of community cooperation, structures of voluntary association, and networks of public communication.”

CS Institutions in Africa

(Bratton 1994)

- Norms of civic community
 - Trust, reciprocity, political tolerance, and inclusion
 - Taught in civic organizations such as schools, churches, and community groups
- Structures of associational life
 - "... all types of voluntary association help to populate and pluralize civil society."
- Networks of public communication
 - "A healthy civil society is a multi-stranded web of crosscutting channels of communication."

“Traditional” Civil Society

- Family
- Community
- Diaspora



African Charter on Democracy, Elections & Governance

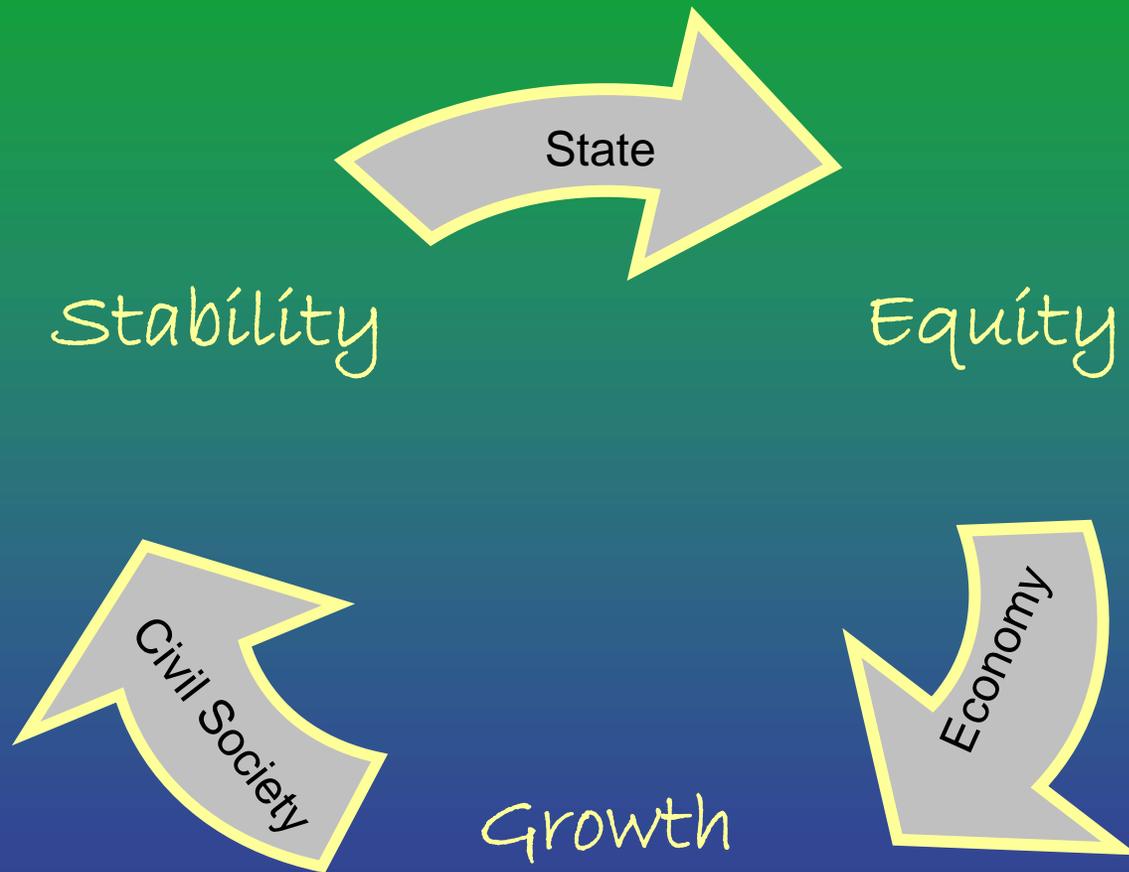
- Create conducive conditions for civil society organizations to exist & operate within the law (Art. 12(3))
- “Fostering popular participation and partnership with civil society organizations” (Art. 27(2))
- “State Parties shall ensure and promote strong partnerships and dialogue between government, civil society and private sector” (Art. 28)
- CS to be included in processes of democracy and good governance

The "Growth" of CS in Africa

- The "Call for Civil Society"
 - Focus on Western impressions of development: human rights, poverty, health, etc.
 - "more organised" CS
- More and more 'non-governmental' development organisations
- "Traditional" civil society is highly forgotten

CS in Development

(Archer 1994)



CS in Development

(Archer 1994)

- 'Good governance agenda'
- 'Western' CS proliferated in Africa
- 'Organised CS', particularly NGOs
- International Principles

NGOs in Africa



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NGOs initiate discussion and organise the needs of people, challenge present values, and guide the necessary action (Myllylä 1998, 56)

Role of 'CS' for Africans?

- 'Organised' CS reaches who?
- Who do NGOs represent?
- Basic support through family

Kiitos!

Ese!

Akpe!

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