

# REPORT



**COWED, CO-OPTED OR OPPORTUNISTIC**

**THE DYING STATE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISM IN SIERRA LEONE**

**A Study commissioned by Network Movement for Justice and Development and  
Civil Society Movement Sierra Leone, May 2015**

# CONTENTS

Abbreviations and Acronyms

List of boxes

Executive Summary

**PAGES**

1.0 Background to the assessment	8
2.0 Objective, Scope and Methodology	9
3.0 The assessment's operational definitions of Civil Society and Activism	11
4.0 Concurrence that Civil Society activism is in decline	12
5.0 ACCOUNTING FOR THE DECLINE IN CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISM	15
5.1 The regulatory environment's support for, or draw-backs on Civil Society activism	15
5.2 Civil Society's approaches and values today	17
5.3 The role of the international donor community	19
5.4 The negative impact of competitive political pluralism	20
5.5 The state's ambivalent relationship with Civil Society	21
6.0 Reclaiming space, voice and passion for public interest activism: Conclusions and Recommendations	24
7.0 List of data sources	26

## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

A.P.C - All People's Congress

CGG- Campaign for Good Governance

CSM-Civil Society Movement

CSO- Civil Society Organisation

EVD –Ebola Virus Disease

ICT -Information Communication Technology

MBOs- Mutual Benefit Organisations

MDAs- Ministries, Departments and Agencies

MoFED –Ministry of Finance and Economic Development

NGO-Non-Governmental Organisation

NMJD- Network Movement for Justice and Development

SLANGO- Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organisations

SLCC- Sierra Leone Labour Congress

SLTU- Sierra Leone Teachers Union

## LIST OF BOXES

1. Sierra Leone's long tradition of Civil Society as check on the public sphere
2. The dangers of preferring to be NGOs and avoiding activism
3. CSOs' preference for their voices to be paid for
4. The silent competition among Civil Society leaders
5. Government officials' dubious resort to party labels to discredit Civil Society
6. The low depths to which CSOs are going as co-opted or recruited fronts for government

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## **A. Background, purpose and approach of the study**

Civil Society played the lead role in moving Sierra Leone from war to peace and democracy. The contributions to peace and democracy in Sierra Leone saw further proliferation of Civil Society Organisations, amplifying the voices of diversity for discussions around complex issues. However, questions have started to be asked about the fate of public interest activism by Civil Society today in Sierra Leone. Network Movement for Justice and Development and Civil Society Movement has sought to identify and understand the factors that may be responsible for the seeming withdrawal of Civil Society from serious activism, and learn from other countries how Civil Society has fought to regain space, voice, visibility and activism. A mix of Desk Research and participatory data collection approaches including preparatory consultations, Key Informant Interviews, and stakeholder validation was used for the study.

## **B. Key Findings**

### **b1. There is concurrence that activism is in decline in Sierra Leone**

There is broad consensus among Civil Society leaders and Civil Society interlocutors that public interest activism has significantly declined in Sierra Leone. Many CSOs are disinclined to pursue issues to points where they gain public exposure as criticsers of powerful organizations or interests.

### **b2. The issues driving down activism**

#### ***The regulatory environment's draw-backs on, or support for Civil Society and activism***

Civil Society leaders and interlocutors agree that the country's laws are generally supportive of civil and political liberties; including associational life. However, while it's easy for associations to emerge and operate, the narrowness and limitedness of the regulatory regime is fostering arbitrary behavior by the state towards Civil Society. Also, a new Non-Governmental Organisations policy that was finalized at the time of this study has provisions that have been protested, including the requirements that organisations pay 2% duty for imported vehicles, annually renew registration, and that they must get attestation that their activities are aligned with those of a line-ministry before registration is granted. There are other Civil Society leaders and interlocutors however who say that overall, the new Non-Governmental Organisations Policy has no effects to impede Civil Society.

### ***Civil Society Organisations' own negative attitudes are contributing to the decline in activism***

There is agreement that Civil Society Organisations are hardly making activist demands on government for change of action or policy as a matter of public interest. CSOs are said to be pre-occupied with "implementing donor-funded projects and programmes" at the detriment of public interest activism. For their part, professional associations, trade unions and Mutual Benefit Organisations have shown very little appetite for making public interest demands, and hardly interact with organizations mainly involved in governance, human rights and service delivery work. Activism requires mobilization of allies and constituencies. However, Civil Society Organisations today are disinclined to seek allies among themselves.

### ***The role on the international donor community***

Many Civil Society interlocutors hold the view that international donors' approaches to working with Civil Society in Sierra Leone have critical characteristics that are diminishing appetite for activism. In particular, it is suggested that international donors' different funding windows, have pre-set over-arching objectives and guidelines to which prospective grantees must respond. Other Civil Society leaders and interlocutors reject the suggestions that donor funding approaches were inhibiting activism. They say that donor funding could be supportive of Civil Society activism in critical ways, such as opening new windows of opportunities for participation in national processes and institution building.

### ***The negative impact of competitive political pluralism***

There is broad consensus among Civil Society activists and Key Informants generally that the current environment of competitive political pluralism is also a source of pressures on civic space and activism in Sierra Leone. It has become the norm for politicians to reach out to their supporters to look at national issues with partisan biases. Civil Society Organisations are also easily given political party labels to discredit any public interest issue they contest with government.

### ***Government's two-prong attitude towards Civil Society***

Government involves Civil Society in many national policy dialogue processes. The opportunities given to Civil Society however, to influence public policy has limited benefits on account of two reasons. Firstly, critics say that government has great control over who it chooses to engage during policy processes and selection of the focal issues, among other concerns. Secondly, many Civil Society Organisations critics suggest, simply do not pursue with any seriousness, public interest outcomes when they join government offered policy dialogue spaces. Outside of policy dialogue processes, many Civil Society leaders and interlocutors suggest that there is covert lid being put on activism by the State through gagging free speech or directly co-opting Civil Society leaders to tow the line of government.

## D. Conclusions and Recommendation

The following recommendations are made to help Civil Society navigate obstacles to reclaim activism:

1. *Engender debate now on the actions of state actors that border on closure of civic space and respond to such actions as they arise.*
2. *Create a platform for rapid Civil Society mobilization and response as required by certain situations.*
3. *Work towards a comprehensive and broader regulatory framework that undergirds support for Civil Society and redress arbitrary behavior of the state.*
4. *Build a robust strategy for Civil Society to keep its own gate for credibility and accountability within the sector.*
5. *Pursue an agenda to re-set the donor/ Civil Society cooperation paradigm.*

# 1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE ASSESSMENT

Sierra Leone has a long and formidable history of Civil Society activism championing popular causes even in the face of adversity. It was the activism and agitations of trade unions, professional associations and civic groups that was pivotal in the struggles for independence in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Civil Society's posture, influence and power were however, critically eroded during years of One-Party rule, civil war and military dictatorship<sup>1</sup>. Describing the situation under the One Party system in particular, Sesay (1999) says that the press was gagged, trade unions castrated, and student activism caged.

Remarkably, Civil Society gained composure and strength to 'mid-wife' Sierra Leone's transition from dictatorship and war, to peace and democracy. In the watershed moments, Civil Society played vanguard role in calling for the holding of the Bintumani 1 and 2 conferences, driving the Lome Peace Accord, and establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It was Civil Society that led the citizens' march on May 8, 2000, on the residence of the leader of the Revolutionary United Front, Foday Sankoh, that signalled the beginning of the end of the civil war.

The contributions of Civil Society to peace and democracy in Sierra Leone have been recognised as remarkable across the African continent. A proliferation of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) had followed in the wake of the struggles for peace, democracy and national development. This proliferation, one report suggests, has amplified the voices of diversity for discussions around complex issues; strengthening the potentials for Civil Society to influence policy in the country.<sup>2</sup>

However, in spite of the promise held for more diversified voices and influence on public policy, questions remain to be answered about the scope, nature and quality of public interest activism by Civil Society today in Sierra Leone. These questions remain because a couple of studies have alluded to behaviours by CSOs that are undermining public interest activism. Questions remain to be answered because for over a decade Sierra Leone has hardly witnessed Civil Society convergence to pursue a matter of national interest through activism. It is also witnessed that Civil Society platforms are either crumbling, or emerging only at the behest of donors or government. Questions about activism cannot be ignored in the circumstances where the Sierra Leone Association of Journalist has categorically stated that the democratic conditions for free media are fastly eroding in the country.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Post-Independence multiparty system ended in 1978 when the country became a One-Party state. Before that, the country had a brief period of military rule from March 1967 to April 1968. Sierra Leone returned to military rule again in 1991-1996 during the civil war. Multiparty rule was restored in 1996 as the war raged.

<sup>2</sup> Sesay, Mohamed Gibril (with contributions from Emmanuel Gaiima). 2014. Sierra Leone- Democracy and Political Participation. A review by AfriMAP and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa. Open Society Foundations.

<sup>3</sup> Sierra Leone Association of Journalists. Press Statement on World Press Freedom Day. 3 May, 2015.



## 2.0 Objective, scope and methodology of the assessment

### 2.1 Objective

Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD) and Civil Society Movement (CSM) desired to investigate and assess the scope, nature and quality of Civil Society activism in Sierra Leone today. The assessment aimed at identifying and deeply understanding the factors that may be responsible for the seeming withdrawal of Civil Society from serious activism, to provide the knowledge base for actions on redress.

### 2.2 Scope

Comparative literature is exhaustive regarding the conditions under which civic space erodes and Civil Society activism diminishes. Taking cue from what is generally established in comparative literature, the following constituted the areas of enquiry and analysis:

#### ***The Regulatory Framework***

It is known from comparative literature that the laws and policies of the state determine in great measure what Civil Society can regularly do and achieve. It is with this consideration that the study reflected on what the regulatory environment is for Civil Society in Sierra Leone; and how that impacts what Civil Society is achieving or not in the country. Considered as part of the regulatory environment are all the country's laws and existent policies that bear directly or potentially on voluntary, and non-profit associational life.

#### ***Civil Society's work and approaches to work***

It is also known from comparative literature that organizations and associations can themselves opt for atavistic and other negative behaviours that could erode civic space and public interest activism. The assessment therefore sought to attest CSOs contributions to the erosion of civic space and public interest activism in Sierra Leone. Here, the focus was on the kinds of work that CSOs are pre-occupied with over the last ten years; and what the motives are.

#### ***The role of the International Community***

Gyiah-Boadi (1999) has noted that nearly all governance promoting non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Africa are run on soft money, usually from foreign donors. Studies, since the return to peace and democracy have suggested that Civil Society in Sierra Leone largely survive on the patronage of Western donors. The situation was particularly severe for governance promoting CSOs that activism particularly pertain to. Sections of Civil Society leaders at the preparatory meeting for the assessment held strong opinion that dependence on Western donor funds was contributing to Civil Society's neglect of activism in Sierra Leone.

### ***Any other emerging issues***

Finally, it is known from comparative literature that cleavages in society can burden the values, orientations and work of Civil Society. It emerged from exploratory discussions for the assessment that CSOs' behaviors and attitudes towards activism in Sierra Leone were being influenced by the current political environment of competitive multi-party politics. The assessment therefore sought to understand how and why this was happening.

### **2.3 Methodology**

A mix of Desk Research and participatory data collection approaches including preparatory consultations, Key Informant Interviews, and stakeholder validation was used. The approach allowed for simultaneousness, reinforced and corroborated data generation.

#### ***Preparatory planning meeting of CSOs***

A pre-implementation planning meeting was held on 8 May, 2015, bringing together more than two dozen CSO leaders to agree on the scope of the study, issues, approaches, processes and outcomes. Although, commissioned by NMJD and CSM, it was desired that Civil Society-wide acceptance and ownership of the assessment be obtained, to serve as a driver of change. The preparatory planning meeting was the start of building that acceptance and ownership.

#### ***Desk Research***

Desk Research was done at four levels. The first level of literature reviewed provided comparative perspectives and insights on Civil Society landscape in Africa and emerging democracies in particular. A second tier of literature was reviewed to narrate the growth, challenges and achievements of Civil Society, since the return to peace and democracy in Sierra Leone. The third level of literature focused on laws and policy documents to highlight the regulatory and practical orientation of the State and their implications for Civil Society, civic space and activism. A fourth level of literature reviewed focused on CSOs, NGOs and donors' programme and project documents to avail the kinds of activities that are pre-occupying Civil Society in Sierra Leone.

#### ***Key Informant Interviews***

Using a semi-structured guide, Key Informants were interviewed in Civil Society, government and international organizations. Persons interviewed as Key Informants were those considered to have been highly involved with Civil Society in the period of the transition to peace and democracy; and those still involved with Civil Society today.

#### ***Validation session***

From 19-21 August, 2015 over 40 CSOs converged in Kenema for a conference on the theme "towards building social movement in Sierra Leone"; under the auspices of NMJD and CSM. As part of the conference's proceedings, a presentation on the study's findings and recommendations was made for validation. The participants agreed with all of the study's findings and adopted the recommendations.

## 3.0 THE ASSESSMENT'S OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND ACTIVISM CIVIL SOCIETY

The study agreed on an operating definition of Civil Society to mitigate contestation of the concept. Often, the contest over the concept serves as an instrument to legitimize or delegitimize different activities by citizens. For instance, Osaghae (1991) reminds us that in Marxian world view all citizens' associational efforts must go towards overthrowing the oppressive state. This clearly stands in sharp contrast with Western notions that see voluntary associations as intervening groups that moderate the relationship between the individual and the state.<sup>4</sup> In effect, voluntary citizens' associations are 'change agents' and transformational processes that facilitate checks on the public sphere. Writers like Ekeh (1975) have on the other hand questioned Western emphasis on public and civic demand-making as problematic; insisting that Africa, for instance, is full of non-profit, voluntary self-generated, self-sustained citizens groups that pursue civic ends without making demands on the state. These Mutual Benefit Organisations (MBOs) as they are sometimes referred to, would include alumni associations and district descendant unions. In the mix of the argument over what citizens groups or not-for profit associations do, and how they exist outside the state, there are those who would bring added notions about whether they are registered or not.

Sierra Leone's long tradition of Civil Society reveals traits consistent with both the Western conceptions and the considerations of writers like Ekeh. Consequently, this study accepts as its operational definition that Civil Society consists of all groups voluntarily constituted outside the state, formal or informal, where people pursue common interest; or transformational empowerment to put checks in the public sphere.

### **Activism**

Activism is defined as the spontaneous, or planned/organized, sustained, non-project or programme-framed, mass-pursued action to effect change to a governmental action or policy. Activism is impossible without popular mobilization. Spontaneity, planning or organising can be led by a charismatic leader, or emerge with leadership, or triggered and organized by an NGO.

- Spontaneity means that the roll-out of the action is never meticulously planned and documented; even though the issue being challenged could have been on people's minds for days, months or years.

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<sup>4</sup> Osaghae, Eghosa . 1994. Editor. Between State and Civil Society in Africa. CODESRIA

## 4.0 CONCURRENCE THAT CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISM IS IN DECLINE

- Planning or organising means that the roll-out of the action is meticulously laid out and documented in terms of what to do, who does what, when to do what, and so forth.
- Sustained means that the action continues until the issue is resolved.
- Non-project, non programme framed action means that a project proposal has not been written and funded as the basis for the issues taken up.
- Mass-pursued action means that there is a population working with the leaders of the activism.

### **Box 1: Sierra Leone's long tradition of Civil Society as check on the public sphere**

**From the mid-1800s to the time of Independence, Sierra Leone had numerous autonomous associations voluntarily organized by citizens, reflecting Civil Society as it is today. The trade unions and artisans organizations of the time included the Sierra Leone Mercantile Association, the Sierra Leone Agricultural Society, and the Sierra Leone Farmers Association. There were professional associations such as the the African Civil Servants Association and the Sierra Leone Bar Association. Many organisations such as the Rate Payers Associations and the Negro Progressive Society emerged to directly make civic demands on authorities. The formation of the African People's Union arose out of the mobilization of citizens to oppose the introduction of the Criminal Code.**

**As transformational agents, Wyse (1989) notes that the citizens associations and organizations combined roles as spaces for mutual benefits activities, fillers of service delivery gaps that were unattended by the colonial authorities, and pursuers of obvious political issues.**

**The facts in this box are taken from Wyse, Akintola. (1989) The Krio of Sierra Leone- An Interpretive History. C. Hurst and Company. See pages 64-67**

The assessment began by seeking confirmation to suggestions that activism is in decline in Sierra Leone. The confirmation was sought at the preparatory meeting of CSOs, through Key Informant interviews, and Desk Review. It emerged that consensus is broad among Civil Society leaders and Civil Society interlocutors that the pursuit of public interest activism has significantly waned in the last decade. Sections of Civil Society particularly “civic organizations” and even service delivery NGOs are raising policy or other public interest questions from time to time. However, the approaches of these CSOs fall far short of activism on many grounds; expert informants agree. Real activism is about sustained engagement with power holders or government until redress is achieved. The policy questions or public interest demands civic organizations service delivery NGOs have been making are not drawn from grassroots expressed concerns, in the opinion of most Key Informant interviewees. The policy questions and public interest demands are made as donor funded projects; and there are no mass constituencies taken along. Because CSO’s are now mostly doing project work, they count their success not by the concessions won, but by the fact that activities were completed within given budget and timeframe.<sup>5</sup> Many CSOs are disinclined to pursue issues to points where they gain public exposure as criticsers of powerful organizations or interests, one recent report notes.<sup>6</sup>

While consensus is broad that real activism is in decline, there is some contest over the drivers of the situation. Among the issues that emerged as drivers of the decline in activism were CSOs opportunistic behaviours that orient them towards donor-funded projects. One study notes that post-war development assistance has transformed the CSO/NGO sector into a major employer of school and university leavers, many of whom do not have backgrounds in social rights activism.<sup>7</sup> They are simply looking to develop careers in public administration or development, the report says. Consequently, they are often keen to avoid the powerful and thereby jeopardizing their future career opportunities.<sup>8</sup> There are other opinions however that see the seeming decline in activism as the result of purposeful activities of the state to shrink civic space, and the pressures of partisan competitive politics on civic consciousness. There is disagreement however, among Civil Society leaders and Civil Society interlocutors as to the varying degrees to which of these drivers account for the decline in activism.

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<sup>5</sup> Opinions at the assessment’s preparatory meeting, 8 May, 2015

<sup>6</sup> Fanthorp, Richard; and Gabelle, Chris. July 2013. Political Economy of Extractives in Sierra Leone.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p53

**Box 2: The dangers of preferring to be NGOs and avoiding popular activism**

*As one Civil Society leaders puts it, “activism is not about having an organization; but about having an issue to fight for. You don’t necessarily need money. What is needed is passion”.<sup>9</sup>*

In Sierra Leone the NGO label is servicing to keep many CSOs from taking up mobilization of citizens to effect change to a governmental action or policy. CSOs could learn from the experiences of Civil Society in India over the last three decades; and be forewarned about the dangers of avoiding popular and mass action. In India, the failures of NGOs to take along mass movements to make demands on the state led to them being discredited in the 1970s and 1980s. In the early 1980s, foreign funded NGOs in particular started being attacked as “agents of imperialism”; ironically not by the state but by the people. It took purposive action for CSOs/NGOs to recover credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of the people. By the late 1990s, it became the vogue for CSOs/NGOs to regain legitimacy and credibility through alliances with popular movements. NGOs/CSOs in India have since gone on to win acclaim for taking up critical social challenges including the fight against corruption.

See Rob Jenkins. Civil Society Versus Corruption P55 – 68 Journal Of Democracy. April 18, 2007 Volume 18

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<sup>9</sup> Interview of Aisha Fofana Ibrahim. The 50-50 Group. 21 May, 2015

## 5.0 ACCOUNTING FOR THE DECLINE IN CIVIL SOCIETY ACTIVISM

### 5.1 The regulatory environment's support for, or draw-backs on Civil Society activism

Sierra Leone's constitution is broadly relevant for the promotion and protection of civil and political liberties and rights, including associational life; all Civil Society leaders and interlocutors agree. However, the state's regulatory framework for Civil Society is not elaborate; and provides mainly for the registration of voluntary, non-profit associations. There are different Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) carrying out the responsibility of registering voluntary, non-profit, non-state organizations. Although, there is no uniformity in the requirements for registration of a CSO, there are no laws that expressly or covertly seek to restrict people's ability to form associations. Consensus opinion at the assessment's preparatory meeting was that there is no worry in Sierra Leone that regulatory barriers stifle the emergence and operations of non-profit, voluntary associations. It should also be noted numerous grassroots associations exist without any form of formal registration.

While it makes it very easy for associations to emerge, the narrowness and limitedness of the regulatory regime is fostering arbitrary behavior by the state towards Civil Society. As an example of arbitrary behaviour, Civil Society leaders highlighted that in 2014, Parliament decided to call numerous CSOs to answer queries pertaining to what they do and how they spend their monies. Parliament ostensibly had concerns to protect the interest of public in whose name CSOs raise monies.<sup>10</sup> It is practically impossible however, for a parliamentary committee to do any serious financial and programme audit of hundreds of CSOs through mere interviews and perusal of documents, Civil Society leaders suggest. They make the point that the vast majority of CSOs are registered with MDAs. These MDAs are supposed to be supervisory and regulatory actors who should be in place to address CSOs financial and programme lapses.

The narrowness and limitedness of the regulatory regime for Civil Society is also leading to undermining support for CSOs by the state. In good democracies, the breadth of the regulatory regime makes expressed provision for state support to the Third Sector. In such countries the regulatory framework makes preferential taxation for CSOs, for instance. In many Western European countries the principle of subsidiarity is used to give civic organisations social and economic tasks, educational and cultural assets to civic organizations.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Report of the Select Committee to Investigate or Inquire into the Activities of various Civil Society Organisations(NGOs, CBOs and NSAs Operating in Sierra Leone. May 2015.

<sup>11</sup> Open Society Institute. Guidelines for Laws Affecting Civic Organizations 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition Year.

### ***The merits and demerits of a new NGO Policy under consideration***

A new NGO policy was being finalized at the time of this study. The essence of the new NGO policy was to take on board issues that were not covered in the old policy.<sup>12</sup> Among the critical new issues taken on board are the payment of Goods and Services Tax, streamlining duty-free concession processes, and making provisions for NGOs to align their work with line-ministries.<sup>13</sup> According to a senior MoFED official, criticism of the new policy has not been adverse. Some of the provisions of the new NGO Policy that have been protested include the requirements that NGOs pay 2% duty for imported vehicles, and annual renewal of registration.<sup>14</sup>

There are however, two critical provisions in the new NGO policy that have a potential to be exploited by state actors to de-legitimise NGOs operations. Firstly, the new NGO policy requires an NGO seeking registration to align its activities with a line-ministry, through forwarding work plans and so forth. The NGO must get attestation that its activities are aligned with those of the line-ministry before registration is granted by MoFED. It is the line-ministry that gives the attestation. "Out of pure malice, politics, or differences arising from policy arguments, a ministry can decide not to grant an NGO attestation".<sup>15</sup> An NGO aggrieved by a decision of a Ministry to refuse attestation of alignment of activities can appeal to MoFED.<sup>16</sup> The second provision pertains to the requirement that an NGO registered with MoFED must seek and hold membership of the Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (SLANGO). The requirement which is in existence in the 2009 NGO Policy Regulations, has always been protested. The new NGO Policy has maintained the provision. Civil Society leaders who protest the provision see it as an infringement on the right to associate. SLANGO is not a statutory institution, but a voluntarily constituted association. Civil Society leaders who protest the requirement say the state therefore has no business forcing organizations to join SLANGO if they do not wish to.<sup>17</sup> There are many Civil Society leaders and Civil Society interlocutors however, who hold the view that overall, the new NGO Policy has no effects to impede the work of NGOs/Civil Society.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Interview of Eric Massaly. NGO Desk Officer, MoFED. 22 June, 2015

<sup>13</sup> Government of Sierra Leone. Position Paper on the Review of the Current NGO Policy Regulatory Framework-2009

<sup>14</sup> Interview of Eric Massaly. NGO Desk Officer, MoFED. 22 June, 2015

<sup>15</sup> Interview of the Executive Director of Center for the Coordination of Youth Activities. 15 May, 2015

<sup>16</sup> Interview of Eric Massaly. NGO Desk Officer, MoFED. 22 June, 2015

<sup>17</sup> The majority of Civil Society leaders spoken to expressed discomfort with the SLANGO membership requirement in the NGO Policy Regulations.

<sup>18</sup> The Coordinator of SLANGO, the Executive Director of CCG, the Chairman, National Commission for Democracy, and the NGO Desk Officer at MoFED, all opined that the new NGO Policy has no effect to impede Civil Society.



## 5.2 Civil Society approaches and values today

### *The NGOs/CSOs preference for donor funded projects over public interest activism*

Previous studies on Civil Society in Sierra Leone since the end of war in 2002, concluded that the pursuit of funds was the principal motivation of CSOs in choosing to do what they do.<sup>19</sup> At the preliminary meeting of CSOs for the inception of the assessment, consensus was broad that CSOs' pre-occupation with delivering donor funded projects is greatly stifling activism in Sierra Leone. There was agreement that CSOs are hardly making activist demands on government for change of action or policy as a matter of public interest. All key informants interviewed agreed that CSOs are too pre-occupied with "implementing donor-funded projects and programmes" at the detriment of public interest activism. The review of literature attested this preoccupation with donor-funded projects and programmes. In reading of project documents of leading CSOs in the country, the phrases in vogue are "dialogue sessions", "engagement with donor", "community and sensitization", "training", and "monitoring. The vast majority of activities that are being pursued by CSOs do the following:

- In *Dialogue sessions*, organizations bring Civil Society, community and government actors to talk over a given issue
- In *sensitization*, CSOs popularise public policy or bring information/education to the grassroots
- In *engagement* CSOs seek to make inputs into government's framing of policy
- In *monitoring* CSOs seek to attest that public services are not pilfered
- In *training* CSOs train grassroots people in mainly human rights and related governance issues

#### Box 3: CSOs prefer that their voices to be paid for

In early 2013 Audit Service Sierra Leone laid before Parliament the annual Audit Report, containing damning indictment of fiduciary practices in MDAs. It prompted CGG to explore what Civil Society could do to improve public financial management and accountability in MDAs. CGG wrote a letter to CSOs convening a meeting to look at the Audit Report and proffer a response. No CSO replied and the meeting never took place. A couple of weeks later, the DfID funded ENCISS project called a meeting of CSOs with the same objectives as CGG's. The ENCISS meeting was well attended. In the opinion of the Executive Director of CGG, the ENCISS meeting was well attended because CSOs were hoping that it was an opportunity for getting a grant.

Anecdote from interview of the Executive Director, CGG. 20 May, 2015.

<sup>19</sup> See M.G. Sesay and Charlie Hughes. 2005. Go Beyond First Aid-International Democracy Assistance and the Challenge of Institution building. (Working Paper 34. Netherlands Institute of International Relations); and A. Jay and Momoh Tarziff Koroma. "From Crying and Clientilism to Rights and Responsibilities". DFID 2003

***Professional associations, trade unions, and Mutual Benefit Organisations have totally abandoned public interest mass activism***

It was professional associations and trade unions that provided core leadership for the momentous activism that facilitated Sierra Leone's move from war to democracy for which Civil Society is well remembered. Among the organizations that provided such core leadership were the Sierra Leone Labour Congress (SLLC) and the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU), and the Inter-Religious Council. Consensus is broad among Civil Society actors that professional associations, trade unions and MBOs are now only concerned with serving their membership; partly accounting for the low level of activism in the country.

A virtual dichotomy now exists in Sierra Leone in which elite professional associations, trade unions and MBOs seem to give up the responsibility of making demands on the state to CSOs in the human rights, governance and service delivery business. Elite professional associations, trade unions and MBOs have shown very little interest in making public interest demands outside of areas of direct interest to them. In the opinion of the majority of key informants interviewed, professional associations, trade unions and MBOs hardly interact nowadays with groups or organizations mainly involved in governance, human rights and service delivery work. They do not even consider themselves as part of Civil Society.<sup>20</sup>

In their withdrawal, professional bodies and trade unions are failing to share with the wider Civil Society vital activism experiences and skills. Equally the withdrawal of professional bodies, trade unions and MBOs is also denting activism by the fact that there are no more readily available constituencies to easily mobilize. Activism is about mass mobilization. Being membership based organizations it was always easier for professional groups, trade unions and MBOs to jolt their members into action over a matter of public interest.

***The critical lack of willingness in Civil Society to networking and cooperate***

Networking and collaboration are critical ingredients in serious activism. Activism requires mobilization of allies and constituencies. CSOs would therefore be naturally inclined to seek allies first within Civil Society. Unfortunately previous studies suggest that networking and collaboration, and exchange of correspondence and attendance at each others' meetings were very weak among CSOs.<sup>21</sup> It emerged from Key Informant interviews that this orientation unfortunately persists. As one prominent Civil Society leader puts it, CSOs mostly converge when there is expectation that grant money will be dished out.<sup>22</sup> A study of CSOs activities in

<sup>20</sup> Consensus opinion of participants at the assessment's preparatory meeting, 8 May, 2015

<sup>21</sup> DAI Europe Ltd. National Scoping Study of Civil Society in Sierra Leone. (2006)

<sup>22</sup> Interview of the Executive Director, CGG. 20 May, 2015.

2006 concluded that while the Civil Society landscape was proliferated with umbrella organizations, only a few were effective. A 2012 study by NMJD revealed the collapse of many prominent Civil Society platforms and networks, in particular some of those that played prominent roles in the country transition from war to peace and democracy. Although Civil Society platforms and networks still proliferate, they are mostly involved with seeking donor funded projects.

**Box 4: The silent competition and jealousy among Civil Society leaders**

When the Constitutional Review Process was launched in 2013, it occurred to the 50-50 Group to call a meeting of women-focused CSOs/NGOs to strategise for the interest of women. Only a handful of CSOs/NGOs responded. The vast majority of CSOs/NGOs that were invited showed no interest, and the meeting was never held. Reflecting on why women's groups failed to rally, the President of the 50-50 Group says that "most CSOs/NGOs leaders only want to be part of an initiative for which they have leadership".

Anecdote from interview with Isha Fofana-Ibrahim (Dr.) President, the 50-50 Group. 21 May, 2015.

### **5.3 The role on the international donor community**

A number of studies on Civil Society in Sierra Leone since the return to peace and democracy have revealed that CSOs generally face serious resource challenges.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, it has been suggested that a vast number of non-profit, voluntary organizations exist at the mercy of international donors.<sup>24</sup> CSOs' dependence on foreign money is having implications for activism in the country, some Civil Society leaders suggested at the assessment's preparatory meeting and in interviews. Civil Society leaders who held this opinion say that international donor's approaches to working with Civil Society in Sierra Leone have critical characteristics that are diminishing appetite for activism. The key challenge, they argue is that that the projects and programmes that civic organizations are undertaking are pre-set by different funding windows. These funding windows have over-arching objectives, guidelines, and approaches to which prospective CSO grantees must respond. Therefore, if CSOs pre-occupy themselves with activities around "sensitization", "dialogue sessions", "monitoring" and "training", it is towards meeting preset donor objectives, guidelines and approaches; they argue. Civil Society leaders also say that international donors typically frown on giving capacity building support to CSOs. With extremely weak resource bases, these funding approaches only heighten CSOs

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<sup>23</sup> See Jay, Richards, Williams. "A framework for DFID support to Civil Society". DFID 2003. Also Sesay, Mohamed G. and Charlie Hughes. Go Beyond First Aid. Democracy Assistance and the Challenge of Institution Building in post-conflict Sierra Leone. (Clingendael 2005).

<sup>24</sup> See M.G. Sesay and Charlie Hughes. 2005. Go Beyond First Aid-International Democracy Assistance and the Challenge of Institution building. (Working Paper 34. Netherlands Institute of International Relations); and A. Jay and Momoh Tarziff Koroma. "From Crying and Clientilism to Rights and Responsibilities". DFID 2003

vulnerability. “One year funding approach and lack of support for capacity building leads CSOs daily scrambling for project money; leading to a withdrawal from real activism”.<sup>25</sup> Other Civil Society leaders and interlocutors reject the suggestions that donor funding approaches were inhibiting activism, a number of reasons were given. “CSOs activism for real cause or public good need not be tied to funding from donor funding sources. Mass civic activism is a product of voluntary expression of shared needs and aspiration from group of people seeking change and transformation”.<sup>26</sup> Civil Society leaders and interlocutors say that in fact, donor funding could be supportive of CSOs activism in critical ways, such as opening new windows of opportunities for CSOs participation in national processes that expand spaces for voice and civic power to influence change in governance.<sup>27</sup> “We support programmes that promote vibrant democracies, encourage CSO to ask tough questions which include democratic accountability at all levels of government”, the country head of OSIWA says.<sup>28</sup> Claims that donor funding approaches were inhibiting activism tends to undermine also the good progress being achieved with institutional/organizational development supports and other related capacities that these funds are building and consolidating such as internal staff capacity enhancement, organizational capacity building to increase sources of funding through proposal writing and of course access to collaboration with other international players and exposure to standards of practices that cross learning and study tours bring with these kind of support.<sup>29</sup>

#### **5.4 The negative impact of competitive political pluralism**

There is broad consensus among Civil Society activists and Key Informants generally that the current environment of competitive political pluralism is also a source of pressures on civic space and activism in Sierra Leone. At the assessment’s inception meeting, and as confirmed in Key Informant interviews, the pressures on civic space and activism from competitive political pluralism were from two sources:

##### ***Partisan considerations diminishing civic purpose***

It has become the norm for politicians to reach out to their supporters to look at national issues with partisan biases. In situations where governance matters are contested, political parties largely disfavor mobilizing people on the basis of solid debate on the merits and demerits of their chosen positions. Political parties instead, mostly prefer to ask their respective followers to tow their chosen stances purely as a matter of party affiliation and loyalty. In a country where 70% of the population is illiterate, this crude tactics is massively eroding the ability of citizens to galvanise and mobilize civic action for a common cause. Consequently, citizens are

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<sup>25</sup> Interview of the Coordinator, National Elections Watch. 21 May, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Interview of head of Non-State Actors Project, Ministry of Finance. 15 May, 2015

<sup>27</sup> Views expressed by Shellac Sonny-Davies, Valnora Edwin and Head of the World Bank Funded Non-State Actors Project, interviews.

<sup>28</sup> Interview of Joe Pemagbi. Country Head of OSIWA. 15 May 2015

<sup>29</sup> Interview of head of Non-State Actors Project, Ministry of Finance. 15 May, 2015

mostly inclined to look at contested issues from the stand point of party affiliation. For most citizens, a political action is only wrong if it is done by a political party that he/she does not support.<sup>30</sup>

CSOs and NGOs are themselves easily given political party labels to discredit any public interest issue they contest with government. Giving citizens, CSOs and NGOs political party labels to discredit their activism has particularly heightened in the last ten years under the ruling All People's Congress Party (APC). On social media, in newspapers, and on radio officials of government regularly prefer to give individuals, CSOs and NGOs opposition party labels anytime governance issues are contested.

**Box 5: Government officials dubious resort to party labels to discredit Civil Society**

*“What they do is to wage a media campaign against you, to discredit your organization with a party label; as long as you don't share the position of government”.*<sup>31</sup>

The Executive Director of the Center for Accountability and the Rule of Law (CARL) narrated one episode of how government officials give opposition party labels to activists to de-legitimise their work. In 2014, both the Executive Director and the Attorney General and Minister of Justice were on Radio Democracy 98.1 to give their varying positions on a legal issue. Instead of countering the position of CARL, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice kept on accusing the Executive Director of being a supporter of the opposition. The presenter of the programme that morning kept asking the Attorney General and Minister of Justice repeatedly to clarify a matter of law; and repeatedly the Minister dodged the issue preferring to label Executive Director an opposition party sympathizer.

Anecdote from interview of the Executive Director of CARL 14 May, 2015.

## 5.5 The state's ambivalent relationship with Civil Society

### ***The use and misuse of government offered policy dialogue spaces***

Since 2002, government has repeatedly recognized the critical role Civil Society could play in national development. The recognitions are expressed in a number of national development

<sup>30</sup> The opinion of participants at the assessment's preparatory meeting. 8 May, 2015

<sup>31</sup> Interview of Ibrahim Tommy, Executive Director, Center for Accountability and the Rule of Law. 14 May, 2015.

policy frameworks.<sup>32</sup> Consequently, Civil Society has been involved in many policy dialogue processes, including the articulation of three Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers to date. Also, there are statutory provisions for Civil Society representation on the Board of Directors of some of the new post-war public institutions. Undeniably, the opportunity is being given to Civil Society to influence public policy in newer ways and in broader areas. The benefits of these spaces for policy dialogue are however being questioned by some Civil Society leaders. Critics say that government mostly hand-picks those pliant CSOs that are expected to tow official lines.<sup>33</sup> Most times, CSOs are invited into these policy dialogue processes with the expectation that they rubber-stamp official positions.<sup>34</sup> Supporting the limitations of the spaces offered by government, one report says that government has unfettered control over who it chooses to engage during policy processes, selection of the focal issues, and the scheduled structure of the policy debate.<sup>35</sup>

There are many Civil Society interlocutors however who put blame on CSOs for any drawbacks that government offered policy dialogue spaces may have.<sup>36</sup> Many CSOs, critics suggest, simply do not pursue with any seriousness, public interest outcomes when they join government offered policy dialogue spaces. For instance, the NGO Desk Officer and the Coordinator of SLANGO indicated that CSOs participation in the review of the NGO Policy Regulations 2009 over the last two years was lackluster; illustrating the unseriousness with which public interest policy issues are sometimes treated.<sup>37</sup>

### ***A climate of rising covert and overt closure of civic space by the state***

In addition to partisan mobilization, Many Civil Society leaders and interlocutors suggest that there is covert lid being put on activism by the State. The principal perpetrators of covert and subtle pressures on Civil Society for ends that detract them from activism are the legislative and executive branches of government. Since 2013, Parliament has made it a practice to call CSOs to face a select committee to answer questions around what they do and how their resources are spent. As said earlier, Parliament ostensibly had concerns over how public interest was protected in whose name CSOs raise monies. Civil Society activists have however, suspected Parliament's actions as a mere ploy to frighten Civil Society.<sup>38</sup> "In the Parliamentary

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<sup>32</sup> These include the National Recovery Strategy 2002-2004, and the three Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers to date.

<sup>33</sup> The opinion of participants at the assessment's preparatory meeting. 8 May, 2015

<sup>34</sup> Ibid

<sup>35</sup> Sesay, Mohamed Gibril (with contributions from Emmanuel Gaiima). 2014. Sierra Leone- Democracy and Political Participation. A review by AfriMAP and the Open Society Initiative for West Africa. Open Society Foundations.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Interview of the NGO Desk Officer, 22 June, 2015; and opinion expressed by the SLANGO Coordinators at the assessment's preparatory meeting. 8 May, 2015

<sup>38</sup> Interview of the Executive Director of NMJD 1 May, 2015

Committee's report that came out in May, 2014, there were no conclusions suggesting that CSOs/NGOs were in serious financial and performance defaults"; confirming for many of us that the action of Parliament was a mere tactic to scare Civil Society.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Parliament has continued with the habit of arbitrarily calling on CSOs for questioning on their legal status, work and finances. In the course of this study a number of CSO leaders reported that they had calls from officials from parliament requesting them to go forward with their registration documents. Civil Society leaders recall that in 2013, the call on CSOs to face Parliament was made publicly. Since then, the exercise has become more covert and random. An organisation would be called without any public announcement to the effect; and at any time.

The Chairman of the Constitutional Review Committee and the majority party in Parliament made the salient point however, that the formation of the committee to look into the affairs of CSOs had clear legal basis and could not be considered arbitrary.<sup>40</sup> They point out that in addition to its eight Standing Committees, Section 93 of the Constitution of Sierra Leone grants Parliament powers to establish any other committee to investigate any matter of public importance. The establishment of the committee to look into the affairs of CSOs is covered by these constitutional provisions. Civil Society could urge Parliament to use the outcomes of the investigations by the committee on CSOs to yield legislative outcomes; the Chairman of the Constitutional Review Committee has recommended.<sup>41</sup>

For many Civil Society leaders, the occasional attempts at gagging free speech are great indications of the closing spaces for Civil Society. The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists is clear that the conditions in which the media works are fastly deteriorating.<sup>42</sup> The head of the West African Civil Society Forum recalls the aftermath of the report on the audit of Ebola management funds by the Auditor General in February, 2015, when the Majority Leader of the ruling APC issued a Press Statement warning people to desist from discussing the audit report.<sup>43</sup> As the debate became heated; and increasingly on the social media for information, a Government spokesman announced plans to pass a bill to regulate Social Media".<sup>44</sup> "Basically, Civil Society was decapitated, so that it could do nothing in a situation where billions of Leones had been allegedly lost in dubious circumstances".<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> At the time of the study the report of the committee on NGOs/Civil Society had not come out.

<sup>40</sup> Interviews of the Chairman, Constitutional Review Committee. 19 June, 2015, and Honourable Ibrahim Bundu. Majority Leader. 29 June, 2015,

<sup>41</sup> Interview of the Chairman, Constitutional Review Committee. 19 June, 2015

<sup>42</sup> Press Release issued by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists on World Press Freedom Day, 3 May, 2015

<sup>43</sup> Interview of the President, West African Civil Society Forum (Sierra Leone Chapter). 3 May 2015

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Ibid



As another way of tempering CSOs appetite for activism, evidence is emerging of CSO leaders being directly co-opted to tow the line of government. In suspected exchange for largesse, co-opted CSOs and their leaders issue press statements countering the positions of other CSOs in public matters; to the satisfaction of the government. Co-opted CSOs and their leaders amplify government's voice within Civil Society, making it difficult to take unified position on a public interest matter.<sup>46</sup>

***Box 6: The low depths to which CSOs are going as co-opted or recruited fronts for government***

As part of their contribution to the Constitutional Review debate, one Freetown-based organization has since 2013 been running a poster campaign in Freetown calling for a “no term limit” to the presidency of Sierra Leone. The campaign by the organisation is clearly a paid job; considering that “no presidential term limits” has gone out of fashion around the world; and looking at the wrath leaders have recently faced in other countries in Africa when they broached the possibility of seeking third terms.

At the height of the Ebola epidemic between August and December, when over 4, 000 people were dying every week in the country, an organisation had a banner thanking the President of Sierra Leone for doing a good job with Ebola. The banner placed on the side of the road, close to the presidential lodge was clearly meant to please the President.

CSOs amplifying the voices of state and serving as government's unofficial mouthpieces are a dangerous emergency in the last ten years. These CSOs make activism extremely difficult by attacking other CSOs, fomenting disunity purposively and serving as fifth columnists for the state.

## **6.0 Reclaiming voice and space: lessons from the continent**

Civil Societies in Africa, Gyimah-Boadi says, face a myriad of obstacles including sustained campaign of state intimidation and repression as they work to support democracy.<sup>47</sup> Often as a precursor to raiding their office, confiscating documents and arresting their leaders, CSOs are labelled as foreign agents. As permanent obstacles, states in Africa have proposed or enacted legislation nominally deemed as national regulatory frameworks for associations, that would

<sup>46</sup> Views expressed at the assessment's preparatory meeting and in a number of Key Informant Interviews.

<sup>47</sup> Gyimah-Boadi, E. 1999. “The Re-birth of African Liberalism”. Pages 34 -47 in Democratization in Africa, edited by Larry Diamond, and Marc F. Plattner. The Johns Hopkins University Press (Baltimore and London)



subject CSOs to crippling degrees of state control.<sup>48</sup> African states sometimes use non-coercive approaches to tame Civil Society. The ranks of core Civil Society leaders are sometimes thinned by their leaders taking up lucrative appointments in government.<sup>49</sup> But a reminder should be made that CSOs can themselves, shrink Civil Society space by pursuing certain tendencies. In Africa, “most disturbingly, some Civil Society groups have been seized by atavistic tendencies, even fracturing along ethnic, regional and religious lines”.<sup>50</sup> The range and intensity of obstacles faced by Civil Society in Africa vary from country to country. What is important for Civil Society in Sierra Leone is to take note of how CSOs are navigating official obstacles to pursue popular mass causes, as shown here after:

***The value of elite professional associations in civic activism:*** Today, Civil Society’s role in Ghana’s resurgent democracy is admired; shrouding a difficult history of state suppression. Under Rawlings for instance, an NGO bill initiated by the National Democratic Congress required “NGOs to be willing and able to work in cooperation with any agency of state that the Minister may direct”. Civil Society in Ghana withstood such attacks partly as the result of the frontline roles played by socially-embedded groups like professional associations, Trade Unions, and Think Tanks. Socially-embedded groups like the Association of Ghanaian Industries have continued to be active in promoting the quality of democracy in Ghana; unlike Sierra Leone where such roles are delegated to civic organisations and NGOs. For instance, towards the 2008 General Elections, the Association of Ghanaian Industries hosted meetings with all the presidential candidates to discuss economic and business policies.<sup>51</sup>

***Information Communication Technology (ICT) breaking state barriers:*** Civil Societies in some African countries are increasingly relying information technology to beat official obstacles. A common usage of ICT is to mobilize people for protests; particularly in situations where activists’ access to traditional mass media can be blocked by the state. In recent times, the use of Facebook and Twitter by activists as platforms for mobilising citizens in Tunisia and Libya and for regime change is well-known.

***The courts’ offer of hope in some countries:*** Civil Society in some African countries are also turning to the courts to restrain the coercive tendencies of the state, or to push the state to meet certain obligations. In Malawi, in recent years, CSOs won a case to over-turn a law that

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid

<sup>49</sup> Gyimah-Boadi, E. 1999. “The Re-birth of African Liberalism” Pages 34 -47 in Democratization in Africa. edited by Larry Diamond and Marc F. Plattner. The Johns Hopkins University Press (Baltimore and London)

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Gyimah-Boadi, E. April 2009. “Another Step Forward for Ghana”. Pages 138-152 in Journal of Democracy. Volume 20. The Johns Hopkins University Press (Baltimore and London)

had stipulated heavy fines for anyone organizing public demonstrations.<sup>52</sup> In May, 2015 a group of CSOs in South Africa made an application to the court to effect the arrest of Omar El-Bashir; who was in the country for an African Union summit.<sup>53</sup> The Sudan President was forced to leave South Africa unceremoniously.

***Building resource independence:*** Civil Society activism can go into decline as a result of too much reliance on donor funds for projects, as the case in Sierra Leone has shown. Towards acquiring the freedom and independence to pursue public interest activism, CSOs are learning to diversify their resource base. In Zimbabwe for instance, CSOs are turning to volunteerism and part-time work to deal with the challenge of funding constraints. Equally, CSOs there are creating alliances with human rights lawyers for pro-bono representation and legal advice.<sup>54</sup>

## **7.0 Conclusions and Recommendations: reclaiming space and passion for public interest**

### **Conclusions:**

Two key issues stand out for consideration and guidance regarding how Civil Society can reclaim passion and strength for pursuit of public interest activism in Sierra Leone. Firstly, the constitutional framework in existence, and the pursuit of a plural, and open society imposes great restrictions on what the state can do to narrow civic space. It is precisely as the result of the controls exerted by the constitutional framework that we see the state resorting to covert means to control Civil Society. The State's pressure on activism is covert because other methods would stand in rude contradiction with constitutional democracy aspirations. Since the state cannot overtly silence Civil Society now, it is the opportunities for covert actions that Civil Society must address.

The second issue is that all of the critical challenges inhibiting civic space and activism in Sierra Leone are going to be around for a very long time; if not forever. There will always be opportunistic CSOs pre-occupied with donor funded projects. Multiparty politics is here, hopefully forever; and therefore there will always be partisan pressures on Civil Society. Only a

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<sup>52</sup> Abu Brima. "Protecting Civil Society Space in Post-Conflict (Aspiring democracy) Sierra Leone. An independent study submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Diploma in Development Leadership. Coady International Institute. St. Francis Xavier University. Nova Scotia, Canada. November, 2014.

<sup>53</sup> The Sudan President had been indicted by the International Criminal Court, and South Africa had obligations to arrest him under the Rome Statute.

<sup>54</sup> Abu Brima. "Protecting Civil Society Space in Post-Conflict (Aspiring democracy) Sierra Leone. An independent study submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Diploma in Development Leadership. Coady International Institute. St. Francis Xavier University. Nova Scotia, Canada. November, 2014.

highly literate population; that also gives emergence to the rise of a more sophisticated political class in the long run, can check the challenges of partisan politics. Donors are forever going to frame the objectives and approaches of the projects that they give funding for. Only a situation in which CSOs are self-sustaining in the long-run can redress the problem of the role of international donors.

The recommendations following therefore, should help civil society navigate this context in reclaiming the space, confidence, and passion for activism, in the immediate and medium terms as building blocks for the longer term.

## Recommendations

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- 1. Engender debate now on the actions of state actors that border on closure of civic space and respond to such actions as they arise.***

Civil Society should start a debate now regarding the arbitrary covert and overt action of state actors that are closing civic space and inhibiting public interest activism. While Civil Society has faced arbitrary covert and overt action of state actors for years now; it has raised no sustained public debate over the issue. CSOs have only been issuing press statements from time to time highlighting discomfort with the behavior of different state actors. The change that is desired in the behavior of state actors should now be pursued through purposive activism, beginning with a debate that ultimately galvanizes a constituency both in the public and in Civil Society.

- 2. Create a platform for rapid Civil Society mobilization and response as required by certain situations.***

It is recommended that a rapid Civil Society mobilization and response platform is created for situations that warrant it. It should be about getting CSOs to rapidly confer on an issue, know where the weight of consensus lie, and agree on actions and their implementation outside of a project/programme framework. Learning from the experiences with CSM, CSAP and SLANGO, the platform should never acquire such institution trappings as bank account, registration, or office that could elevate it into another project implementation outfit.

- 3. Work towards a comprehensive and broader regulatory framework that undergirds support for Civil Society and redress arbitrary behavior of the state.***

As a matter of utmost importance, Civil Society should work towards a comprehensive legal and regulatory framework for the non-profit, and citizens' associations sector. The comprehensive legal and regulatory framework would go beyond mere registration issues or policy setting for

service delivery NGOs, as the case is right now. A comprehensive legal and regulatory framework that enhances Civil Society could make considering for harmonizing registration of non-profit, voluntary associations, adoption of standard accounting obligations for the Third Sector, tax preferential benefits, and dissolution and liquidation of organizations/associations. It is the plan of government to pass into law a new Non-Governmental Policy Act, based on the new NGO policy that was being finalized at the time of this study. Civil Society should seize this opportunity to call for a more comprehensive Third Sector-wide legislation.

**4. *Build a robust strategy for Civil Society to keep its own gate for credibility and accountability within the sector.***

CSOs themselves carry the great onus to be accountable in the eyes of the public. It is recommended that Civil Society takes responsibility for raising the credibility and accountability profile of CSOs through what is usually referred to as self-regulation. The public's perceptions of CSOs have direct bearing on activism. Credible and accountable organizations more than suspicious ones, easily mobilize people because of the trust they endear. Building a robust strategy for credibility and accountability gate-keeping in the sector could involve working with the international donor community and government.

**5. *Pursue an agenda to re-set the existing donor strategy for supporting for Civil Society.***

It is lastly recommended that Civil Society engages the international donor community to reflect on, and take action on typical funding approaches that are claw-backs on activism. Essentially, the engagement would seek to re-set Civil Society – donor relations to mitigate opportunistic behavior in CSOs towards projects, and build Civil Society capacity to deliver public goods for the long-haul.

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