



**ADDRESSING CIVIL SOCIETY'S CHALLENGES:
SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS AS EMERGING INSTITUTIONS**

by L. David Brown & Archana Kalegaonkar

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Addressing Civil Society's Challenges: Support Organizations as Emerging Institutions

by L. David Brown & Archana Kalegaonkar

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Abstract

This paper proposes a framework for understanding the challenges that face civil societies in many countries as they are pressed to take larger roles in social, economic and political development. Experience suggests that the inherent characteristics of civil society and its relations to the state and market sectors produce challenges that are similar throughout many regions. The paper describes civil society support organizations which adopt as their primary task the provision of technical assistance to civil society and its organizations. The paper explores how support organizations help deal with the challenges facing civil societies, as well as the special challenges facing the support organizations as institutions themselves. We suggest that strengthening support organizations can have multiplier effects for the civil societies they serve and so contribute to promoting sustainable development.

Introduction

The rise of the non-governmental, non-profit associations of civil society as increasingly important actors has been described by a number of observers (for example, Schneider, 1988; Salamon, 1993). Civil society organizations appear to play a particularly important role in social, political and economic development activities (Edwards and Hulme, 1996; Riddell and Robinson, 1995; Brown and Korten, 1991; Clark, 1990). In part this shift has been grounded in disillusion with the state as an agent of development in comparison to local associations (Hyden, 1997); in part it has been catalyzed by evidence of the importance of local civic activism for political and economic change (Putnam, 1993).

This turn in development thinking has focused much attention on building the capacities of civil society organizations (CSOs) to carry out larger roles. Much of the early capacity-building activity focused on needs defined by donor agencies, themselves focused on accounting for donated resources. Increasingly, however, external donors have paid attention to capacities that enable CSOs to expand their developmental impacts. In 1998, an international meeting of foundations, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, and Northern

and Southern non-governmental development organizations constituted an International Forum on Capacity-Building to provide a venue for ongoing dialogue about innovations, problems and practices that can strengthen civil society.

This paper develops a framework for identifying challenges that face civil societies and some of the institutions emerging to deal with those challenges. It draws on theories developed in several disciplines but its intent is to articulate a framework that is grounded primarily in research and practice of civil society development organizations. The next section provides a brief overview of civil society and its relations to other sectors and then suggests a panoply of challenges facing it, some inherent in its nature and others that emerge from its relations with other sectors. The third section introduces the idea of civil society support organizations as institutions that respond to those challenges. The fourth section highlights problems that appear inherent to the nature of support organizations. The concluding section notes some implications of the analysis.

Challenges to Civil Society

Civil society includes the structures of voluntary association, the values and norms that mobilize citizen action, and the modes of independent communication and information sharing that enable citizen awareness and activity (Bratton, 1994). The civil society is often discussed in contrast to the state and the market (Wuthnow, 1991; Brown and Korten, 1991). Put simply, the state is concerned with public goods and mobilizing resources through state authority; and the market is concerned with producing private goods and services and mobilizing resources through market exchange. Civil society, by contrast, is concerned with common goods defined by social groups and it mobilizes resources through social visions and values (Wuthnow, 1991; Wolfe, 1991). Civil society organizations and associations include neighborhood groups, churches, non-governmental development organizations, cooperatives, soccer clubs, choral societies and many other associations. In a diverse society, the agencies of civil society—organized around very diverse values, norms and beliefs—are likely to reflect that heterogeneity.

The promotion and defense of social values by civil society can lead to organizations with many diverse roles, from government or business watchdogs to innovators in social problem-solving and providers of services to underserved populations. Civil society organizations can respond flexibly to many social problems but the nature of civil society and its relations to the other sectors can also generate problems and dilemmas that undermine the ability of civil society organizations to carry out their social missions. This section will focus first on problems internal to civil society that seem to be generated by its core characteristics, and then turn to problems that are grounded in relations to other sectors.

Internal Challenges: Civil Society Failures

The strengths of a sector may also define its inevitable weaknesses, which are problems that arise out of the inherent nature of the sector's institutional structures. The problems of natural monopolies and failure to produce public goods are inherent in the nature of the free market in economic theory, and the tendency for government agencies to be bureaucratic, unresponsive and slow to change may be equally inherent in the institutions of state power. The concepts of market and state failure have sometimes been used to explain the existence of civil society organizations as actors supplementing these sectors (e.g., Hansmann, 1987; Douglas, 1987; Behn, 1998). But that approach treats civil society as the "residual" institutional category, filling in for the inadequacies of the other two sectors. We believe that civil society has an independent role to play in society and that at least some of its difficulties, which subvert its capacity to fulfill its visions and missions, grow out of its own set of sectoral failures. In this we follow the trail blazed by Salamon (1987) in his analysis

of the partnerships between non-profit and public agencies in the US. But we focus here on the implications of this form of analysis for civil society actors concerned with solving social problems in developing countries.

The challenges that emerge for civil societies vary across countries given differences in political and economic context, institutional history, international contact and values and visions that mobilize popular support. At the same time, however, some aspects of the following civil society failures are likely to emerge: restricted focus, amateurism, material scarcity, fragmentation and parochialism. These problems are often the shadowed side of civil society strengths, but they frequently have negative consequences for the sector's ability to accomplish its goals.

Restricted Focus. Civil society is comprised of many diverse groups, each articulating its own core values and serving particular constituencies. The capacity to respond to many different interests is one of the great strengths of an active civil society, providing a panoply of avenues for mobilizing resources to respond to special concerns and needs. However, the particularism that underpins this diversity can also be a sectoral weakness in that civil society organizations may be unresponsive to interests outside their narrowly defined constituency (Salamon, 1987).

Particularism can make it difficult for civil society organizations to move beyond their initial constituencies to serve wider groups. Concentration on narrowly defined groups and problems can blind civil society organizations to the larger picture, including the ramifications of their services for the broader society or the macro-level causes of the problems they seek to solve. For example, an NGO road-building program in the Dominican Republic helped some villagers get to the market but created erosion and environmental degradation for other villages that were not involved in the program. A restricted focus may also result in the inefficient use of scarce resources, as many small organizations provide similar services without any of them achieving scale economies.

Amateurism. While voluntarism is a key asset peculiar to civil society, the technical competence of volunteers does not always coincide with program requirements. Development NGOs that depend on voluntary contributions may not be able to attract qualified professionals who might receive higher salaries from government or business organizations. Consequently, the "barefoot doctors" who dispense medical care for civil society organized health programs are often less trained than traditional doctors and nurses. This is not to say that there are not highly qualified professionals working for civil society organizations—but it may well be difficult to get all the needed staff to volunteer. If a professional staff is paid at rates similar to other sectors, the discrepancies between their salaries and those paid to committed amateurs may erode the value commitments that are vital to the viability of civil society organizations.

A second common issue of amateurism in civil society organizations affects their leadership. Many founders of successful civil society initiatives are gifted entrepreneurs or visionaries who can mobilize support for their concerns from many sources. But many of them are much less experienced in organizing and managing civil society organizations that grow past the point of informal coordination. Many civil society leaders are amateurs in dealing with the financial, managerial and organizational implications of growth past a very small scale of operation. They may find it difficult to get support for organizational arrangements that will expand or intensify program impacts.

Material Scarcity. Civil society mobilizes resources on the basis of commitments to values and visions for a better world. However, there are relatively few issues that can command commitments of material resources to support large-scale or long-term initiatives. Consequently, expanding and continuing civil society services

often requires infusions of material resources from other sources, such as the state or, for development NGOs, international donors. In addition, civil society organizations may be plagued by “free riding” in which the public benefits of their activities are enjoyed by others who contribute little or nothing to their creation (Salamon, 1987).

In general, civil society does not have the kind of reliable access to material resources that is commanded by the authority of the state or by success in the market. As it is difficult to generate and sustain civic commitment on a large scale over a long period of time, issues that require long-term attention, widespread mobilization and large financial resources may experience serious resource constraints. When the constituents of civil society activities are relatively poor and powerless, opportunities for expanding the material base are further limited.

Lack of material resources can pose painful dilemmas for civil society organizations. They may have to choose between limiting their activities to those covered by voluntary resources or accept strings attached to resources from other sources. NGOs that accept state funds, for example, may be subject to pressure to meet bureaucratic procedures and standards (Brown and Tandon, 1992; Lipsky and Smith, 1989-90), and support from international sources may be accompanied by burdensome accounting requirements. Heavy reliance on donors can also constrain NGO criticisms of funder policies (Edwards and Hulme, 1996). The tension between civil society’s access to resources and its independence is a serious dilemma.

Fragmentation. The rise of many civil society actors organized around diverse values and visions can create a sector of great richness and complexity, offering many opportunities for innovative problem-solving and creative action. Sector pluralism, however, can also lead to widespread duplication of effort, the proverbial reinvention of the wheel, and missed opportunities for coordination and synergy.

When value differences or competition over scarce resources produce conflict within the sector, civil societies may become so fragmented that they lose opportunities for sharing innovations and learning from one another, coordinating programs to make scarce resources go further, or joining forces to expand impacts and influence other actors—such as the government—at a scale impossible for any one of them working alone. Civil society leaders in the Philippines, for example, suggest that sector fragmentation made difficult a united front on land reform policy that could have been adopted immediately after the fall of Marcos. Fragmentation can also increase civil society vulnerability to manipulation by resource providers with different agendas.

Parochialism. Civil societies mobilize resources around visions for a better future, and the creation of such visions is one of the sector’s great strengths. But commitment to values and visions can also produce a kind of ideological parochialism that rejects other sectors and, indeed, anyone not committed to an orthodox stance. Their emphasis on social values as the basis for action may lead civil society organizations to denigrate the motives and behaviors of others with different perspectives. These attitudes can make it difficult or impossible for them to recognize or act on common interests, even where possibilities for mutual gains exist. The ideological differences between proponents of strategic needs-based feminist agendas and grassroots development approaches, for example, reflect this dilemma (Kalegaonkar, 1997).

Parochial perspectives can easily become self-fulfilling and undermine civil society’s ability to understand or influence the actions of business or government actors. Civil society organizations may try to carry out activities, such as agricultural extension services or public health activities, which are better performed by the other sectors. Civil society organizations are seldom well positioned to replace state or market institutions; however, they may be very effective in advocating or catalyzing improved or joint activities that deliver better

service to impoverished groups (Bratton, 1989a; Brown, 1993), provided they can resist the temptation to react on the basis of parochial stereotypes.

External Challenges: Intersectoral Relations

The contexts in which civil societies operate and evolve are likely to have big impacts on their shape, capacities and performance. Salamon and Anheier's 1994 international survey of non-profit sectors suggests that the nature of the sector is heavily influenced by factors like the legal system under which it operates, the degree of political centralization of the state, and the level of social and economic development in the country. The scope for achieving development goals through intersectoral activities is drawing increased attention (Waddell, 1997; World Bank, 1997; Brown and Ashman, 1996), so meeting the challenges posed by intersectoral relations is increasingly vital.

We will focus on three external challenges here, each related to the external forces identified by Salamon and Anheier: public legitimacy and accountability, political space and government regulation, and business relations. Our intent here is not to be exhaustive but to illustrate potential problems.

Public Legitimacy and Accountability. In countries where there is a long history of public acceptance and activity of civil society organizations, their nature and role in society is widely respected. In India, for example, voluntary associations working on social problems have histories going back centuries, and there is substantial support for their activity even though there is relatively little financial support generated by the public. In many other countries, however, there is relatively little public understanding or recognition of the legitimacy of civil society and its organizations. Without such generalized legitimacy, individual CSOs may be very vulnerable to attack from other sectors—or from within civil society itself.

Often associated with public legitimacy is the existence of legal systems that establish the rule of law, rights of assembly and freedom of speech, and systems of regulation that establish rights and obligations of civil society actors. In other countries, support for civil society is “limited by the lack of clear, coherent, and supportive regulations” (CIVICUS, 1997:i) or subject to arbitrary changes as governments try to develop a coherent posture on civil society roles. In the absence of government recognition and an established set of supportive regulations, CSOs may be defenseless against arbitrary intrusions and rulings by state actors, political terrorists or other antagonists. NGOs in Bangladesh have been subject to arbitrary rulings and even decertification by the NGO Bureau when they have been seen as threatening to the interests of state bureaucracies. Government regulations in Andean countries are turning NGOs into implementers of state programs rather than participants in national policy dialogues (Bebbington, 1997:1758).

The lack of a public tradition or legal context to support civil society organizations can be exacerbated by problems of accountability. Since the beneficiaries of CSO activities are often a constituency quite different from those who provide the material support for those activities, the nature and constituencies of CSO accountability may be problematic (see Edwards and Hulme, 1996). The mechanisms for many civil society organizations by which key constituents can assess their performance and hold them to meeting performance standards are not well understood or developed, so the sector remains vulnerable to accusations that they are not accountable or responsive to their primary constituencies (Najam, 1996).

State Relations: Political space and government regulation. Relations between civil society organizations and the state often give rise to serious challenges. In many countries government actors are deeply suspicious that civil society organizations will be potential competitors as deliverers of services to constituents, channels of resources from international donors, or as watchdogs and challengers of state policies and actions (Bratton,

1989b; Bebbington, 1997). Suspicions may run particularly deep in countries with highly centralized regimes that see all development activities as their responsibility, where NGO services are seen as potential threats to state power.

In countries where government agencies are the primary holders of resources and the main providers of programs which foster grassroots development, NGOs committed to grassroots empowerment understandably look to the state for effective programs. When government agencies become major financial resources for NGOs, the priorities of those NGOs may become subordinated to those of the state (Brown et al., 1997; Lipsky and Smith, 1989–90). Alternatively, NGOs may become major critics of government failures to deliver services or live up to their responsibilities, and so become targets of government wrath.

Civil society organizations adopt a range of strategies for dealing with government action and political space, from low profile work that draws little attention, to implementing government programs, cooperatively developing joint programs, contesting government actions with mass movements, and building transnational alliances to influence international patterns of recalcitrant governments (Bratton, 1989b; Brown and Ashman, 1996; Royo, 1998). But the success of such strategies turns on good understanding of the political possibilities of the specific situation, and CSOs that misjudge those potentials may encounter serious shrinkage of the political space in which they must work.

Market Relations: Business cooperation, cooptation and capture. Links with the for-profit sector are emerging as a major growth area as the privatization, liberalization and globalization of many developing country economies proceeds and resources allocated to development from Northern countries continue to shrink. The ability of civil society organizations to work with private businesses is shaped by the perceptions and attitudes of both sectors. The Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum, for example, views partnerships between business and community groups to be an effective means of promoting sustainable economic development (1996). Similarly, the Philippines Business for Social Progress (PBSP), a foundation established by corporate leaders, also sees the value of businesses working with civil society in order to bring about development. Consequently, PBSP actively supports community organizations and others in their activities with private sector colleagues. Where mutual recognition does not exist, however, the potential for mutual gain goes unrealized.

Cooperation with market actors can make much-needed resources available to civil society organizations. But such cooperations can be double-edged. Expanding and improving programs with market resources is undertaken at the risk of becoming coopted to market interests. The Kagiso Trust in South Africa and PBSP have both been criticized by some civil society actors for working too closely with the business community, even though that cooperation has brought new resources and perspectives to bear on important social problems. Contacts with businesses, like contacts with the government, may also result in a human resource drain as particularly effective civil society leaders are recruited by organizations with more resources and opportunities.

Businesses typically do not seek to influence civil society organizations as a sector, but they will attack organizations seen as direct threats to their interests. Consumer advocacy groups that block business development projects may find themselves subject to efforts based on persuasion, bribery, intimidation and even outright coercion. Press reports in the early 1990s of Royal Dutch Shell's activities in Nigeria note its role in sponsoring thugs that attacked citizen protesters.

Finally, relations with the market sector pose a serious problem as foreign resources available to NGOs increase, because those resources will attract agencies which are nominally NGOs but which have in fact been

organized for market reasons. In some regions, already high percentages of NGOs competing for funds reflect the capture of civil society organizations and their conversion to a profit-seeking role.

International Relations: Whose Civil Society? The fact that civil society is in some countries a foreign concept not congruent with existing cultural, political and institutional realities can pose serious challenges to civil society organizations. In many countries where civil society organizations work in development activities, many resources and programs are started and maintained by international civil society organizations that are easily characterized as agents of foreign cultural, political and religious traditions. When local and national interests question the concept of civil society organizations and action, civil society actors risk being dismissed as “foreign” or “imperialist” if they cannot link their activities to the values, visions and expectations perceived as legitimate in local and national terms.

Even when program values and activities resonate with local institutions, the fact that so many material resources are being mobilized to support the development of civil societies can have a perverse effect. When civil society organizations are seen as dominated by foreign resources and programs, they can be portrayed as implementors of other cultures and values. High dependence on external resources and values can undermine the identities of national and local civil society organizations in their own eyes as well as in the eyes of skeptical or antagonistic observers. Such losses of identity can drastically undermine the legitimacy of civil society organizations as development actors.

The Challenges to Civil Society

Table 1 summarizes the internal and external challenges posed to civil societies as they become more active players in the processes of social, political and economic development. These challenges vary across countries, both because of the variety of external contexts in which they are played out and the variety of civil society organizations and actors that are involved.

The array of challenges is daunting. It is worth noting that many of these challenges are exacerbated as civil society organizations become more important actors; as long as they are acting on the margins of social development, they remain relatively unaffected by such pressures. It is when they become central players in social, political and economic transformations—as in the last decade for many countries—that the problems posed by many of these issues become more salient.

Table 1: Challenges to Civil Society

Internal Failure	Source in the Sector	Implications for Civil Society
A) Restricted Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of social values and visions to focus action on concerns of groups • Appeals to narrowly defined social identities and ideologies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blind to larger problem causes or consequences • Difficult to move beyond initial constituencies • Duplicate or compete with other CSOs • Limited scaling up of successful programs
B) Amateurism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilize staff by appeals to values and beliefs • Expanding activity requires more technical, organizational capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-skilled human resources • Limited organizational capacity • Ineffective organization and program management
C) Material Scarcity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobilizing revenues by values and beliefs limits resources • Poor constituents have few surplus resources to support services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSOs work best on value-driven projects that need volunteers, not material resources • Programs hard to replicate/scale up • CSOs depend on a few donors so lose autonomy
D) Sector Fragmentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low start-up costs enable many diverse organizations • Scarcities and narrow focus foster competition • Large tasks or opponents require joint action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Duplication of initiatives and failure to coordinate lessens impact and wastes resources • Competition with other CSOs reduces influence on large actors (donors, governments) • Failure to recognize shared interests/take collective action
E) Sector Parochialism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy emphasis on values and norms as basis for action • Negative stereotypes of actors with different values and norms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stereotyping reduces communication • Opportunities for joint gain go unrealized • Reduced influence over other sectors, even when they can supplement or widen programs.
External Problem		
A) Legitimacy and Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publics do not recognize or accept key roles of civil society • Rights of assembly and speech critical for sector • Not accountable to beneficiaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little popular support if attacked • Little legal protection or enabling context • Highly vulnerable to accusations of elitism or foreign control.
B) Relations with the State	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State perceives as competitor • State supplies financial resources • State sensitive to criticism from civil society actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem worse as civil society programs grow • Cooptation of civil society to state priorities • Reduced political space or repression of civil society actors
C) Market Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business supplies resources • Business response to criticism • Business sees opportunities in civil society growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooptation of civil society business priorities • Reduced political or resource space • Business-organized NGOs capture resources
D) International Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign NGO supplies resources • Links to foreign NGOs raise identity questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link programs to local values and priorities • Build clear identities grounded in local values and roles

The Rise of Support Organizations

Civil societies contain an ever-increasing variety of diverse organizations. Efforts to catalogue that variety have proven very challenging (e.g., Salamon and Anhier, 1994). Even focusing on the portion of civil society concerned with social and economic development yields a range of types (e.g., Padron, 1987; Vakil, 1997; Brown and Korten, 1991). Vakil (1997), for instance, has suggested a typology of non-governmental organizations based on functional orientation (welfare, development, advocacy, development education, networking or research) and level of operation (community, national, regional or international). She does not, however, deal directly with a class of civil society organizations characterized by large numbers of local organizations that has become increasingly prominent in civil societies. In many countries around the world, agencies that we classify as civil society *support organizations* are playing increasingly important roles in strengthening civil societies. In our definition, support organizations are independent, values-based, civil society organizations whose primary tasks are to provide technical services such as training, research, information, advocacy and networking to strengthen the abilities of their civil society constituents to accomplish their missions.

Support organizations are *values-based civil society organizations* in that they are—like many of their constituents—organized around social values and missions. They are “part of the broader movement of voluntary development NGOs...they have a world view of their own; they have a vision of a new society and they share some of the philosophical and ideological underpinnings which guide the voluntary development NGO movement” (Brown & Tandon, 1990:5). This perspective differentiates them from commercial service organizations, whose assistance is based on economic exchange rather than shared ideology. It may even distinguish them from other civil society actors such as universities, whose research responds primarily to the concerns of academic disciplines rather than civil society constituents. Their emphasis on social values and development missions distinguishes support organizations from other actors that may offer similar services.

Support organizations have the *primary task of providing technical services* that are adapted to the needs of the civil societies they serve. As civil societies evolve and face new challenges, the demand for support services may evolve as well. Many NGOs carry out support functions in that they provide some technical services to a task without that task becoming their primary reason for being. As civil societies have expanded and become more differentiated, agencies dedicated primarily to support roles have emerged. The services offered may also evolve as civil societies’ activities and priorities change. For example, civil societies that wanted basic training for community organizers fifteen years ago may be calling for training in policy analysis and advocacy or large-scale project management today.

This definition is consistent with the usages of some recent descriptions of support organizations. Table 2 summarizes some earlier definitions for organizations that play support roles in civil societies. Some of them are quite consistent with the definition that we have adopted here, such as those articulated by PACT (1989), Brown and Tandon (1990), Fowler (1997), and Tandon and others (1997).

Table 2: Definitions of Support Organizations

PACT, 1989	<u>Voluntary Resource Organizations (VROs)</u> : support or serve the national NGOs rather than having village-based field programs. This support takes the form of coordination, delivery of specific services and facilitation of far-reaching program strategies (p. 4).
Stremlau, 1987	<u>Coordinating bodies</u> : membership organizations [that] perform a variety of functions for NGOs, including serving as a forum, providing services, facilitating contact between governments and NGOs and allocating donor funds to NGO projects (p. 213).
Padron, 1987	<u>Non-Governmental Development Organization (NGDO)</u> : mobilize the energies and resources of grassroots sectors...and often go beyond the limits of the projects...in their activities. NGDOs develop alternative forms of knowledge...and constantly create new forms of development cooperation relationships (pp. 69-77).
Brown & Tandon, 1990	<u>Support Organizations</u> : provide a wide variety of support activities—such as research, training, technical assistance, information sharing, advocacy and networking (p. 5).
Carroll, 1992	<u>Grassroots Support Organization (GSO)</u> : forges links between the beneficiaries and the often remote levels of government, donor and financial institutions. It may also provide services indirectly to other organizations...or perform coordinating or networking functions (p. 11).
Fisher, 1993	<u>Grassroots Support Organization (GRSO)</u> : support [grassroots organizations] and their networks...that mainly provide services...and those organizing the poor and promoting social change (p. 96).
Osborne & Tricker, 1994	<u>Local Development Agency (LDA)</u> : develops new voluntary action, provides services, promotes good organizational practice and promotes links [to] government agencies (p. 38).
Tandon, et al., 1997	<u>Support Organizations</u> : provide support...through research, training, documentation, advocacy and networking.... Identifying with grassroots groups and sharing with them a search for alternative strategies (p. 2).
Fowler, 1997	<u>NGO Support Organization (NGOSO)</u> : are not mandated by, and do not represent, an NGO constituency or membership. They are designed to gain skills and knowledge from action research with NGOs and the aid system and share what they have to offer through publications, training courses, seminars and in-house consultancy. Institutional and organizational capacity development is their major strength (p. 208).

Others have different emphases. Stremlau (1987) and Osborne & Tricker (1994), for example, emphasize the importance of a membership base as an essential element in their definitions. The membership form of organization is helpful for functions such as networking but problematic for other functions, like effective organizational capacity-building, that cannot easily be delivered in equal amounts across a large membership. Padron (1987), Carroll (1992) and Fisher (1993) emphasize providing direct support to grassroots actors. While this service may be crucial to civil societies concerned with building local organizations, there is also a place for support organizations such as development NGOs which serve a more limited clientele when they develop special needs for technical support, such as the management of multi-district, large scale programs, or help in policy analysis and advocacy.

As civil society has grown to take on a more expanded role in society, support organizations have emerged in several patterns. Many development NGOs have expanded to provide support functions. For instance, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), which has traditionally been involved in credit and rural development programs, now provides information dissemination services, training programs and management assistance. Other organizations have started out with a focus on support functions. The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), for example, began by providing participatory research and training support to NGOs and social movements but has added advocacy and organizational capacity-building programs in response to civil society demands. Similarly, Fundacion para Educacion Superior (FES), in Colombia, which served initially as a financial grant-making agency, has added networking and capacity-building services to its support activities.

Types of Support Organizations

It is now possible to identify several generic forms of support organizations, although many offer more than one set of services. The types of services and forms of support organization vary with the history of the civil society and its present challenges. Five broad types of support organizations can be identified: associations, alliances and networks, human and organization capacity-building organizations, financial resource organizations, research and information institutes, and intersectoral bridging organizations. The first four types of support organizations are concerned with strengthening capacities within the civil society sector; the last is concerned with building better relations between actors from civil society and from the state and market.

Associations, alliances and networks. One of the most basic purposes served by support organizations is to provide a forum for CSOs to come together and interact with one another. Network or coordinating bodies provide structures that facilitate discussion, permit shared understandings of development issues to emerge, and encourage coordinating strategies for resolving those issues. The National NGO Council of Kenya, for example, brings together members to discuss issues facing the civil society of Kenya such as national legislation for regulating the sector. Regional networks such as the Latin American Association of Development Organizations (ALOP), enable civil society organizations and associations from the region to discuss matters of shared concern, such as the availability of capacity-building support.

This convening role helps to overcome fragmentation tendencies within civil society by identifying shared concerns and by offering opportunities for mutual education and alliance-building. Information exchange and coordinated action planning can expand the impact of civil society initiatives through scale economies in service delivery or collective action to influence policy.

Networks and shared-interest associations foster broader perspectives on development issues as well as other actors such as government agencies and donors. In Sri Lanka and Pakistan, for example, support organizations helped shift NGO strategies from welfarism to a development orientation (PRIA, 1995). The mainstreaming of gender into development policy and programs in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Pakistan is also attributable in part to support organizations' gender-sensitization workshops.

Networks and alliances can also enable civil society to exert influence impossible to individual agencies. Federations and alliances can affect all three sectors (Edwards and Hulme, 1996:965). The interregional alliance to regulate the use of infant formula in Africa, for example, catalyzed the development and adoption of an international corporate code of conduct at the UN (Johnson, 1986), and coalitions of Northern and Southern civil society organizations shaped significant policy changes at the World Bank (Fox & Brown, 1998). Alliances among civil society organizations can expand CSO perspectives and impacts well beyond the reach of individual organizations.

Human resource and organization development organizations. Many CSOs face scarcities in the human resources critical to their ability to expand and improve their programs. Problems may even include leaders unprepared to lead expanding organizations. Many support organizations focus on strengthening the internal capacities of CSOs, addressing a range of issues from strategic thinking to organization development, leadership skills and financial management (Brown & Korten, 1991; Fowler, 1997). Support organizations that train leadership or staff teams, or provide expert advice in managing growth, can help CSOs solve their problems of organizational and technical amateurism.

Human and organization capacity-building may also heighten the awareness of the sector to larger issues—and to the potential roles of other sectors—and so have impacts on the narrow focus and the parochialism of civil society actors. As many members of the sector develop shared concepts and languages from common educational experience, they may also become less subject to fragmentation and restricted perspectives. Widespread training programs, for example, can build shared perspectives and understanding across regional and organizational differences.

Financial resource organizations. The dependence of many development NGOs on external resources, the continued concern with “donor fatigue,” the periodic threats of government regulation or restriction of external resources, and the growing concern with the sustainability of local initiatives all attest to the importance of establishing local sources of support for civil societies. Financial resource organizations focus on the material scarcities that challenge many civil societies. This may include amassing and distributing funds to civil society organizations, as organizations like PBSP or FES do. Some financial support organizations also take on the challenge of being a bridge between foreign resources and local actors, spanning what may be a very large social distance between donors and recipients. Thus Kagiso Trust in South Africa was a conduit for European Union funds to anti-apartheid activities, and CAPART in India administered government resources committed to support NGO activities.

Although the main focus of financial resource organizations often starts with problems of financial scarcity, experience suggests that they often branch out into other kinds of support in order to enhance the effectiveness of their constituencies (See Ashman, Zwick & Brown, 1998). PBSP, FES and Kagiso Trust all expanded their services to include capacity-building initiatives of various kinds to supplement their financial support so that grantees would be able to make better use of their support.

Since many financial resource organizations depend on relations with state and market institutions to mobilize financial resources, they are also potentially important actors in reducing the sectoral parochialism of the civil society actors. Drawing on their links to the other sectors, they are well-positioned to serve as early warning systems to civil society actors and to act as credible third parties in managing conflicts among sectors.

Research and information organizations. Research and information institutes can provide ideas, tools and perspectives that are grounded in the same values and conceptual appreciations of the world as civil society actors. Such studies as state-of-the-art papers, program evaluations and policy reports inform CSOs about possible roles in and impacts on development. These support organizations provide links to ideas, developments and frameworks emerging in different regions and sectors that would otherwise remain inaccessible. They may also transform new ideas to fit local realities or recognize the wider relevance of local innovations. The Institute for Liberty and Democracy in Peru, for example, gained worldwide attention for its ideas about the liberation of the informal sector from excessive bureaucratic regulation. The tools of participatory rural appraisal and participatory action learning, fostered by the Institute for Development Studies and its partner institutions in dozens of countries, have been widely disseminated to thousands of practitioners.

Supplementing the research role of support organizations is that as information clearinghouses. By actively disseminating studies, reports, and newsletters, such support organizations encourage the use of knowledge. They can increase awareness and build shared perspectives throughout the sector of events and developments, thereby reducing fragmentation across the sector and expanding awareness of larger perspectives. They can provide insight into government and business decision-making and priorities, and so reduce parochialism and tensions with other sectors. The Rural Reconstruction Alumni and Friends Association (RRAFA), for example, shares the results of participatory research with grassroots organizations in rural Thailand and with national policy-makers to inform their decisions with accurate local information. Transparencia monitors World Bank projects in Mexico to assess how well the Bank lives up to its own policies and shares the results with many stakeholders in order to shape future policies and projects.

Intersectoral bridging organizations. Some support organizations act as bridges between civil society and the institutions of other sectors like government agencies or corporate actors. Such bridging organizations may be critical actors in an increasingly interdependent world, and civil society organizations may be particularly important catalysts for such interorganizational action (Brown, 1993). Relations between NGOs and the state are clearly critical factors in many development initiatives (Evans, 1996; Sanyal, 1991). There is increasing evidence that the relations with the business community may also be important for sustaining improvements (e.g. Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum, 1996).

Organizations that span the chasms between civil society and other sectors take several forms. In some countries, such bridging organizations help civil society organizations learn how to influence government policies and programs through advocacy. In many regions civil society interest in policy advocacy has escalated dramatically in the last five years, and some civil society organizations have demonstrated previously unheard of abilities to shape policy. Bridging organizations may also promote cooperative initiatives that join civil society and state resources. LPES in Indonesia, for example, played a critical role in enabling grassroots actors and government officials to jointly devise a policy that devolved control of irrigation systems to water user groups (Brown and Ashman, 1996; 1998). In transmitting knowledge, resources and concerns across sectoral boundaries, these support organizations act as catalysts for intersectoral activity. In the process, they help to reduce sector parochialism and restricted focus.

Organizations that link civil society organizations to market actors are relatively new in most countries, since the role of business as a development actor has been emerging only in recent years. These agencies provide information and orientation to both business and civil society actors, identify possibilities for mutual gain, and mediate agreements to realize those gains. Thus the Savings Development Foundation in Zimbabwe was able to coordinate the interests of village savings clubs, the Ministries of Agriculture and Community Development and a fertilizer company to produce a program that generated savings for agricultural improvement in thousands of poor villages (Bratton, 1989b). While such agencies are particularly relevant to facilitating intersectoral business–civil society contacts, they may also contribute to resolving internal problems like narrow focus, sectoral parochialism and material scarcities by bringing their own views and resources to the table.

Summary. Support organizations have emerged in the last two decades in many civil societies, particularly in those characterized by diverse and productive development NGO activities. Their activities appear to be at least in part a response to the internal and external challenges that face growing civil societies. Table 3 summarizes the discussion of this section in terms of types of support organizations, their impacts on civil society challenges, and the ways in which they address various challenges.

Table 3: Support Organizations and Civil Society Failures

<i>Type of Support Organization</i>	<i>Civil Society Failure</i>	<i>How the Failure is Addressed</i>
Associations, Alliances and Networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fragmentation • Restricted Focus • Relations with State • International Relations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide forum for agreeing on shared issues • Act as organization for coordinating and implementing collective action • Represent sector with external actors
Human Resource and Organization Development Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amateurism • Parochialism • Fragmentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen technical and organizational capabilities • Build broader perspective on civil society • Build common understanding of issues
Financial Resource Organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material scarcity • Restricted focus • Amateurism • Parochialism • Relations with donors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate and distribute financial resources • Create fora to network, coordinate CSOs • Provide technical assistance with funds • Act as sectoral intermediaries
Research and Information Institutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restricted focus • Fragmentation • Parochialism • Relations with State, Business, International 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand perspectives on CSO roles • Coordinate CSOs through information dissemination • Generate more understanding of sector interdependencies • Provide perspective on roles of other actors
Intersectoral Bridges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parochialism • Restricted focus • Relations with State, Business, International 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translate concerns and interests of sectors • Expand perceptions of joint interests • Access to mutual gain relationships with other actors.

Challenges to Support Organizations

While the experience of support organizations varies substantially depending on their political, economic and social contexts, some patterns that recur across contexts may be inherent in the support organization role. These challenges can threaten the effectiveness or even the survival of the organization. They may also represent opportunities to be utilized by alert support organizations.

The Liability of Newness. Many support organizations face the challenges of defining a new organizational role and sectoral function, especially when they emerge in response to the changing needs of civil society. Support organizations that respond to emerging issues are pressed to establish legitimacy with key stakeholders, such as the civil society organizations to be served and the funding sources that provide support. The Orangi Pilot Project in Pakistan, for instance, was able to draw on its founder’s credibility with donors for initial support, but it spent six months gradually cultivating relationships and establishing credibility with slum dwellers in Karachi before it could embark on community development programs (Brown, 1993:5).

When support organizations start up as the creators of a new sectoral role, they are especially vulnerable to questions and attacks from inside and outside the sector.

Competing Constituent Demands. Successful support organizations often become highly visible actors in civil society since they have contacts with many different actors. They are often expected to ally with many competing parties on controversial issues, and must balance their allegiance to different civil society constituents carefully. They must in addition meet the expectations of donors, governments and other civil society actors if they are to be effective in the long term. Internal staff struggles over alliances with external constituents can absorb tremendous amounts of leadership time and energy. They can also sometimes split the organization with very destructive consequences.

Rapid Growth. Support organizations that tap growing sectoral needs may be overwhelmed with demands for their services. Rapid growth presents a host of problems, including finding skilled staff, mobilizing sufficient support and managing an expanded organization. When many Indian development NGOs decided they needed leadership training and organizational capacity-building, they called for a rapid expansion of the programs and consultations offered by PRIA. Rather than expand its direct services, PRIA fostered a national network of regional support organizations (PRIA, 1995). This strategy reduced the administrative load on PRIA, but it required finding entrepreneurial leaders to build the regional support organizations.

Strategic Diffusion. Multiple demands and expanding programs can easily distract support organization leaders from delivering services and programs that will have the most impact in accomplishing the agency's mission. This is particularly a problem for support organizations that are immediately accountable to an active membership, since they are subject to strong demands from clients as a consequence of their governance systems. Balancing multiple demands while maintaining a strategic focus is an art for support organization leaders.

Professional-Voluntary Tensions. Support organizations provide technical services and expertise such as training, organizational consulting, policy analysis and advocacy, and research capacity that are not available to most civil society organizations. The civil society amateurism problem has special force for support organizations that seek to provide high-quality technical assistance. Support organization leaders may have to invest much time and energy to recruit professional staff committed to the organization's mission and values who are willing to work for comparably low salaries.

Organizational Learning Disabilities. The role of support organizations changes as the demands and challenges facing their civil society constituents evolve. For example, a series of meetings among South Asian support organizations has documented a dramatic rise in concern for policy advocacy in those civil societies over the last seven years. One consequence is growing demand for policy analysis and advocacy training by support organizations in the region. The call for new services and the possibility of rapid demand changes require that the support organization build its own capacity for organizational learning. But such learning capacity can be disabled by the organization's investment in professional competencies and ideological commitments tailored to current demand, so organizational learning may require fundamental organizational changes. Many support organizations, for example, have resisted the idea of cooperating with government agencies when their staffs have long histories of seeing government recalcitrance and corruption as the primary problem. Organizational learning may also require responding to a variety of external challenges, such as pressures from changes in government or new donor policies, that are perceived by many staff as distractions from their primary role.

The support organization role is fraught with tensions and challenges, as the organization emerges to respond to civil society development. The challenges identified above may vary considerably with the stage of development of civil society, organizational growth demands and relationships to multiple constituencies. Alert support organizations, with support from other actors, may often find ways to address these challenges to strengthen themselves as institutions while contributing to the continuing influence and viability of civil society.

Conclusion

Civil societies are being called on to play increasingly important roles in development efforts. To meet that challenge, civil societies themselves will have to increase their capacity to deal with internal and external challenges. This paper has argued that a range of challenges predictably emerge for civil societies, especially those concerned with promoting development. They include internal problems that grow out of the nature of the sector such as restricted focus, amateurism, material scarcity, fragmentation and parochialism. They also include external challenges that are rooted in civil society relations with other sectors, such as legitimacy and accountability, and relations with the state, the market, and the international arena. We regard this analysis as a step in developing conceptual maps that can guide efforts to strengthen civil society organizations and the sector as a whole.

Civil societies in many countries are increasingly served by a class of institutions we have called support organizations—values-based agencies whose primary task is to provide technical support to the sector and its organizations. Those agencies include associations, alliances and networks, human and organization development organizations, financial resource organizations, research and information institutes, and intersectoral bridging organizations. They respond to many of the internal and external challenges to civil society, and in the process find themselves in positions of catalysts for many forms of organizational and social learning. Better understanding of the characteristics and roles of such support organizations will enable more effective intervention to strengthen civil societies.

The issues surrounding capacity-building for civil society organizations are attracting increasing attention from development academics and practitioners. We believe that capacity-building initiatives that enable a more effective response to civil society's internal and external challenges will have wide multiplier effects. Initiatives that enhance the capacity of civil society support organizations may be a particularly useful way of targeting civil society organizations whose efforts will enable sustainable development for impoverished and disenfranchised groups.

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