5. The Role of Non-State Actors
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5.1 Introduction
It is generally recognized that the process of building a capable state requires the participation of all the vital forces of a nation. A capable state is one that has all the attributes of a modern, strong, responsible and responsive state, a state capable of effectively discharging its duties of delivering security, peace, prosperity and other public goods to its people. Although the state has traditionally been considered as the focal point of this process, other sectors, including non-state ones, have an important role to play, and the importance of this role has grown significantly over the past couple of decades as the limitations of the post-colonial state in providing for the needs of its people have been made all too clear.1

It is thus important to identify these other actors and recognise those areas wherein they can contribute, and have indeed contributed, to the process, as well as to appreciate better their nature, their mode of intervention, the constraints hampering their action as well as to explore ways in which their participation can be rendered more fruitful and less problematic. But before we delve into the subject of non-state actors and their role in the creation of the capable state in Africa, it would be useful to look into just what the capable state is and means, and what it has meant for the African continent since the advent of independence half a century ago.

5.2 Definitional Issues
5.2.1 Overview
The capable state may be defined as one that effectively fulfils its obligations to its constituents by providing and safeguarding a range of goods, both tangible and intangible,2 that assure its people of a secure public space wherein they can live and love, produce and reproduce, and pursue the enjoyment of the fruits of their labour and love. Such a state will have attributes such as territorial integrity, public order and safety under the rule of law; ample political space for individual and group self-realisation; and socio-economic justice and equity that minimise conflict and foster intra-national peace and harmony. It is the absence of these attributes within states that creates what have come to be known as “failed”, “failing” or “dysfunctional” states, whose common denominator are varying degrees of precariousness.

In these terms, the African state that came into being upon decolonisation had its work cut out. From centuries of successive forms of extreme exploitation, oppression and brutalisation, African nations found themselves confronted with the daunting task of, on the one hand, putting in place governance systems that would ensure the survival of the nation-state that was essentially an artificial creation of the colonial regime, cobbled up from a multitude of disparate and often mutually hostile ethnic entities and, on the other, assure a minimum of livelihood for the people by delivering education, health and other social services, securing good prices for agricultural produce, providing jobs through mining and

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industrialisation, and generally taking care of the nation, including providing welfare for those who could not fend for themselves.

Herculean as these tasks were the first crop of African leaders assumed them with gusto. In fact it was the leaders who enthusiastically promoted these expectations, either because they needed seductive promises to make their peoples rally to the anti-colonial banner, or because they genuinely believed that once the colonialists were out of the way all was possible. Mkandawire\(^3\) sheds a harsh light on this “central preoccupation” with “development”. “African leaders have always been aware of the need for some nationalist-cum-developmentalist ideology for both national building and development… The quest for an ideology to guide the development process inspired African leaders to propound their own idiosyncratic and often incoherent ‘ideologies’ to ‘rally the masses’ for national unity and development. If such ideologies are still absent it is definitely not for lack of trying.” Thus, it was made possible for people to expect that the state would do everything for them, in this way fostering the concept of l’Etat-providence, the provider State. Some African states did indeed attempt, with varying degrees of success, to deliver on some of their promises, but it did not take long for most of these attempts to prove Sisyphean, rolled back by a number of factors, including, but not limited to, the following:

- Poor governance and managerial practices;
- Over-centralisation of power in the hands of a small group, or of one individual;
- Emergence of authoritarian/dictatorial/military regimes;
- Failure/reluctance to devolve power and responsibilities to local authorities;
- State corruption;
- Ethnic bias, nepotism, exclusion of whole sections of populations;
- Deterioration of terms trade on the world market;
- Unsustainable levels of state intervention in delivering social services;
- A crippling dependency syndrome on the part of populations heavily reliant on government handouts, and on the part of governments dangerously dependent on donor handouts.\(^4\)

By the end of the 1980s, it had become clear that the various development strategies different African countries had followed had not led to the desired outcomes. Despite the earlier promise of the 1960s, and the modest but positive growth figures of the 1970s, the 1980s came to be known as the ‘lost decade’, a grim epitaph epitomizing the shattered dreams of a whole continent, a reality from which African countries, having lost their initial elegance, have not fully emerged to this day. The World Bank blamed this inability to deliver development on “a strategy (that) was misconceived” in the sense that in their hurry to modernize, African governments were wont to copy rather than adapt Western development models, with the result that they found themselves with “poorly designed public investment in industry; too little attention to peasant agriculture; too much intervention in areas where the state lacked managerial, technical and entrepreneurial skills; and too little efforts to foster grassroots development.” This top down approach, according to the World Bank, “demotivated ordinary people, whose energies needed to be mobilized in the development effort.”\(^5\)

\(^3\) Thandika Mkandawire, “Thinking About Developmental States in Africa”


It has been rather a case of ‘double jeopardy’ in the sense that the State that promised to deliver economic development – the ‘developmental State’ – also took away political and individual rights, constricting the political space in which citizens could enjoy full political participation, the argument being that incessant political bickering and rivalry would sap the developmental potential and undermine the nation building project.

In the end, the African State, caught up in its ‘developmentalist’ quest, delivered neither economic development nor democratic governance. The State became more ‘commandist,’ more intolerant of contrary ideas from its citizens, less reluctant to devolve power to local entities, more given to the use of force as a solution to political issues, and gradually descended into the mire of autocratic rule, the more egregious of which were military dictatorships and/or, later, rule by warlords and their militias.

Faced with this stark reality, it became imperative to rethink governance with a view to finding alternative ways of confronting the development challenges of our peoples. At this same time, towards the end of Africa’s ‘lost decade’, momentous events were taking place in the world that were destined to usher in a major paradigmatic shift in world political relations. The end of the ‘Cold War’ was unfolding even as efforts were being made to see African countries ‘democratise’ and the discourse of that process threw to the fore a hitherto little heeded breed of protagonists, variously known as civil society, NGOs or non state actors. In Eastern Europe, some of these organisations played a central role in bringing about the fall of the Communist regimes, such as was evidenced, especially, by the Polish experience with the workers, union-based Solidarnos, as well as other civil society movements in Romania, East Germany, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union itself. Although there is little evidence to suggest that these movements sustained their role in the new, post-Communist governance systems – except that a trade union leader took over the State in Poland, and a poet in the Czech Republic – their importance had been recognized and stood ready to be deployed elsewhere. Africa, just like Eastern Europe, was emerging from a long period of negative development, and, as such, it was thought, what had worked in the former Communist regimes might work in African countries.

As we shall see later, this would have a bearing on the way many of these non state actors, whether packaged as Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or simply Non State Actors (NSAs), would be viewed in many African countries, which would also, to a large extent, inform their effectiveness on the ground.

The concept of Non State Actors (NSAs) has gained currency worldwide in the past couple of decades, as researchers, sociologists, activists and mediators have sought to comprehend and recognise the nature of interventions that fall without the purview of the State and yet have to be reckoned with if a certain beneficial action has to be enhanced or if a given knotty situation calls for sustainable denouement. NSAs cover, but are not limited to, NGOs, and may generally be subsumed under civil society organisations (CSOs), although it is important to note that an important attribute distinguishes some NSAs from the concept of civil society. In much of the literature on the subject, these three concepts are

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6 Shivji, supra
often used interchangeably, with the concomitant confusion that such interchangeability may sometimes engender.

Civil society is a concept which, although ancient in origin, has seen more frequent usage over the past three decades, and its current usage, emphasising its non-state character, is a far cry from the attributes given it by the philosophers of antiquity, who, in fact, saw it as part of the state. Its evolution down the ages, through the Enlightenment, to 19th Century revolutionary (esp. Marxist) thinking and to its current, firmly non-state character, makes interesting if sometimes confusing reading, but this paper concerns itself chiefly with the present situation, the aim being to understand the interaction between the state and non-state actors and how that contributes, or may be helped to contribute to the building of a capable state in the Africa of today and tomorrow.

One interesting reading about civil society is by Michael Edwards, who finds that “Civil Society has become a notoriously slippery concept, used to justify radically different ideological agendas, supported by deeply ambiguous evidence and suffused with many questionable assumptions.” And yet Edwards goes on to state that Civil Society, at least in its operation, has created a “third sector,” that part of society that over time has developed in the space between the family and the state, but excluding commercial firms, a space wherein the “habits of the heart”, including such attitudes and values as cooperation, non-violence and trust are privileged and nurtured, thus helping to foster “a different rationality, identified as civil.” It is this space thus created that may be summed up by the exclamation, Neither Prince nor Merchant: Citizen! Inherent in this injunction is the primacy of the position of the citizen in the mediation of social relations unhampered by the coercive force of the State or the philistine pursuits of commerce.

Conceived in the general framework of resistance against State-sponsored despotism and unwanted intrusion, as well as against the basest appetites of the profit motive, the notion of Civil Society was given a new impulsion during and after the collapse of the Soviet bloc, which coincided with the end of Africa’s “lost decade.” Ironically, the new dynamism of the civil society movement has also come about as a result of what has been termed “retrenchment and privatisation” of the State, the erosion of the traditional power of the State in the wake of “rapid global market integration, increased mobility of people and capital and rapid social and technological change.” These developments have been accompanied by the breakdown of the traditional welfare state, trade unions and the nuclear family, doing away with the conventional safety nets, and leading to heightened levels of uncertainty and feelings of vulnerability, creating a need for new forms of organisation to fill up the vacuum left behind by these rapid transformations.

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9 ibid
10 Marc Nerfin, quoted by Miguel Darcy de Oliveira and Rajesh Tandon, Emergence of a Global Civil Society, CIVICUS 1995.
11 Edward, supra
In the African context, the conditionalities imposed by the Breton Woods institutions in the 1980s, including the Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), meant the disengagement of most African governments from economic activity as well as from their role as providers of social services such as education and health, termed in those years by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as ‘non-productive’ sectors.12 The new forms of organization of the ‘Third Sector’ that have sprung up on the African continent as a result of these developments have been extremely diverse and do not lend themselves to easy categorization, although we can identify the main types of NSAs, including NGOs, CSOs, and their role in governance issues as well as how they relate to the State in Africa. Yet it is always useful to remember that civil society, in various forms, has always existed in African societies, as we are made aware by Aina.13

Generally, NSAs in Africa can be grouped in the following, non-exhaustive categories, each one with attributes and characteristics that may vary from country to country and from time to time, although there is enough between them to allow the discernment of important commonalities.

5.2.2 Non Governmental Organizations
This is probably the most recognizable category, with the biggest name recognition, having been on the scene longest. These are mostly single issue organisations, engaged either in development activities or in advocacy work. In development work they tend to be restricted in scope, operating in small geographical areas, covering small groups of people. In single issue advocacy, they have chosen problems close to the heart of the founders, such as rural poverty, women and children rights, campaigns against female genital mutilation, etc. Sometimes, though, they have extended their wings vertically to build synergies with other grassroots organizations doing similar work, eventually leading to the formation of national umbrella organizations. In other instances, the movement has been in the other direction, where the national/umbrella organization came first and then ramified downwards.

Some of NGOs have chosen to serve more broad-based constituencies, such as when they cover multifaceted area like human rights, general gender issues, poverty, development forums, political liberalisation, economic liberalisation, etc. Sometimes they have tapped into the knowledge base of single issue associations, which has helped them to present a more holistic picture of NGO activities at national or regional/international level. According to Aina these may include, in an urban setting, “Christian and Islamic religious associations, ethnic associations, women’s organizations, professional associations, employers’ and occupational bodies, student and youth groups, cooperative/mutual help groups, special interest groups such as human rights associations, and a new range of NGOs such as community and neighbourhood groups and philanthropic and welfare associations…”14

NGOs and civil society organizations generally acquired new vigour and currency in the development lexicon worldwide in the early 1970s, especially before, during and after the first United Nations Conference on the Environment in Stockholm, in 1972. This was followed by the 1974 UN Conference on Population in Bucharest, and subsequent major UN conferences on development issues (women,
social development, environment, human rights, population, urbanisation etc.) where the presence of NGOs - parochial, national and international - kept growing. These parallel conferences, the number of whose participants has now largely outstripped that of the governmental delegates, have exerted considerable influence on the proceedings, and even outcomes, of the formal meetings. Many of these NGOs are headed by urban-based educated elites, with ties to donor agencies and versed in the development lingo favoured by donors, which gives them easy access to funding and linkages with their Northern counterparts. This has been important, not only in making more funding accessible but also in facilitating synergies between Northern and Southern NGOs, which have helped to popularize internationally causes that would have otherwise remained parochial and inconsequential in the eyes of the wider world.

5.2.3 Other Civil Society Organisations

Although the definitional difficulty plaguing this area remains intact, it may still be fair to state that some civil society organisations do not sit well within the appellation NGO, even if they do certainly share many attributes with the NGOs, such as being, simply, non-governmental. Some of these are described below.

**Media**

One of, if not the most important actors in African governance, the media has seen its importance rise exponentially over the past two decades or so, in tandem with the liberalization of African political and economic regimes. Whereas up to the end of the 1980s a large percentage of African print, and a quasi-totality of electronic media were in the hands of governments and their agencies, today most of the media outlets - including radio and television - are in private hands. This has broken state monopoly over the sources and the content of information. In a significant number of countries, this new media reality has been instrumental in sensitizing public opinion against corruption, graft and sleaze, offering a platform to political and social views previously muzzled and helping to curb official impunity in issues of human rights abuses.

**Faith-based Organizations**

Organized around a confessional community, they help members of their congregations to get together and pool resources, including sharing ideas, to tackle common problems. Their activities may include adult literacy classes; training in basic trades and skills. Their basic financial sustenance is assured by the confessional centre around which they operate – church, mosque, etc. – although often they contribute small sums towards the realization of their own projects.

**Trade Unions**

Traditionally the most potent of all civil society, African trade unions were born in the crucible of the anti-colonial movement for national independence, and for a brief period after independence they formed the core of the social forces engaged in an attempt to define the parameters of governance in the newly independent state, but were soon muzzled and subsumed within the one-party state. With the rise of neo-liberalism and the onslaught of the Washington Consensus, with privatisation of state enterprise

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15 Mari Fitzduff and Cheyanne Church, *Stepping up to the Table: NGO Strategies for Influencing Policy on Conflict Issues* in NGOS at the Table, ed. Mari Fitzduff and Cheyanne Church
as a central plank, the power of trade unions withered from dwindling numbers and the concomitant political irrelevance. In some countries (e.g. Zambia, Zimbabwe) they morphed into political parties and abandoned their traditional role.

The Private Sector
This category encompasses a wide range of actors, mainly involved in for-profit pursuits in commercial, trading, contracting, farming, mining, and other areas. Its importance has grown dramatically since the economic liberalization processes that have taken place across the continent, especially with the marked withdrawal of the state from many of its former economic interventions. It ranges from large corporate entities to small and medium entrepreneurial actors providing a variety of services to the community. It is also a sector that, on a very basic level, provides gainful employment for a huge number of citizens, thereby helping to reduce the size of armies of unemployed youth, and includes peasants, artisans, petty traders, vendors and hawkers. As we witness the dramatic retreat of the African state from direct economic activity and service delivery, the private sector is steadily assuming a more central role in the provision of many services that were once the preserve of the state.

Business associations
Although representing for profit constituencies, chambers of commerce, agriculture, manufacture, mining etc. can play an important role in economic governance, including advising their governments on how to help them grow their industries in equilibrium with the interests of other sectors of society, as well as in the promotion of self-regulation. The importance of these associations arises out of their centrality in the productive sectors.

Professional Bodies
Organisations representing professionals bring to the table of governance the views and experiences of those groups of people who oil the machinery of governance on a day to day basis and without whose active input there would be little governance to speak of. Lawyers’ guilds, medical practitioners’ associations, accountants’ bodies and others, play a crucial role in ensuring that their adherents perform their duties diligently and with probity and in checking professional misconduct and sanctioning fraud. They are of special importance in promoting self-regulation in areas in which governmental bodies lack specialized competence.

Academia, Student and Youth Organizations
These are among the most vocal and articulate members of civil society, supported by their relative youth and exposure to new ideas. In many cases, they have tended to be more confrontational with the state, which has led to frequent closures of many of the universities in Africa. The role of academia has, however, been undermined by the lure of attractive consultancies, usually commissioned by governments and donor agencies. These activities, lucrative as they are for the consultants, leave little time for serious teaching and also lead to intellectual compromise, as it becomes difficult to bite the hand that feeds one.

Cultural Associations and Kinship Networks
Many of these have their roots in pre-colonial times and survived the colonial experience, even if that experience distorted their function and took away much of their luster. With the ‘retrenchment’ of the
State and its withdrawal from the provision of essential services, these networks have assumed a new vigour as individuals and groups seek safety nets where they find succour in an environment of uncertainty and desperation. These are more loosely and informally organized and in many instances have had to weather centralizing tendencies of states that have tried to suppress them as part of an ostensible nation building project, such organizations being viewed as tribal and, therefore, divisive. Mabogunje\(^\text{16}\) gives examples of these networks in various parts of the continent where, faced with diminishing central state presence and assistance, the local population has organized self-help organizations, including age grade associations, to deal with multifarious problems, including economic self-help and security, such as the *kombi-naam* of the Mossi people of Burkina Fasso.

5.2.4 ‘Non Civic’ Non-State Actors

In the general category of Non State Actors, wherein we have identified civil society actors that can be labelled as ‘civic’ civil society, is it possible to talk about ‘non-civic’ civil society, or would this be a contradiction in terms? In a continent that has been seriously devastated by armed conflict and in which almost half the countries have, over the past two decades, experienced insurgencies or internecine conflicts of varying levels, it is prudent to take the role of armed non-state actors seriously, not only because most if not all these insurgencies and conflicts have expressed a governance grievance such as exclusion, but also, and especially, because efforts deployed for the solution of these insurgencies have often proven futile without the direct participation of the insurgents themselves.

Armed non-state actors may not be easy to fit into any rough and ready definitional category, but they can be recognised in the following categories, which cannot be in themselves exhaustive:

a) Rebel groups which have an expressed/stated incompatibility with the government

b) Militia operating locally, based on support from an ethnic community or clan

c) Warlords controlling geographical areas and populations

d) Vigilante groups

e) Civil defense forces, clearly operating outside state control

f) Private companies offering security and military services\(^\text{17}\)

Different armed groups have had different reasons for taking up arms, to fight either against their states or against other non-state groups. Most times the issue in contention has been the perceived exclusion of sections of the population from full enjoyment of citizenship rights, including participation in governance systems or access to resources, and a belief that another group or groups are having a lion’s share of the ‘national cake’. An egregious example of this in the African context is the conflict that is raging in the Nigerian Delta region, where armed insurgents have militarily taken on oil multinationals, kidnapped their employees and conducted non-state diplomacy before their release. Elsewhere, the forms of real or perceived exclusion vary; they may be ethnic, linguistic, religious, geographical or political, usually triggered by discontentment among groups of politicians left out of the political processes and who now turn to their natural constituencies.

\(^{16}\) Shivji, supra

\(^{17}\) Caroline Holmqvist, *Engaging Non-State Actors in Post-Conflict Settings*
Quite often in these conflicts the success of an armed group in marshalling support will depend on the legitimacy of their claims as assessed by members of their groups as well as the advantages members of such groups hope to reap by joining up or giving support, weighed against continued fealty to a state that may no longer fill the bill of protector and provider. This has been offered as an explanation for the young people who, having been snatched from their families and kin and placed outside normal societal structures, ‘confer on commanders a surrogate father role.’18

If members of a community are convinced that their State security forces are more inimical to their safety and wellbeing than the rebel forces in their area, they may willingly join up with the latter, such as was revealed in a 2004 study of women’s behaviour in conflict zones. It was shown that in 18 different armed rebel groups ‘nearly all women joined armed groups to shield themselves from violation of their physical and mental integrity’19 by state forces. The activities of these groups are all too often underwritten from across the border, such as when neighbouring states support each others’ insurgents (eg. Sudan/Uganda; Liberia/Sierra Leone; Rwanda/Zaire; Chad/Sudan; etc.) or by interested foreign powers, especially in the Cold War context (the West’s support for UNITA in Angola and RENAMO in Mozambique).

Whatever the origins of these insurgencies, and notwithstanding their behaviour vis-à-vis international norms regulating the conduct of war and conflict, it is important to keep them in mind and to know what motivates and sustains them and how they can be brought into the process of peace making.

Experience has taught Africa that in the search for the denouement of a conflict, all the main actors must be involved as much as is possible to explore the extent to which they can contribute to that process (Mozambique, Angola, Sudan, Uganda, Burundi, Cote d’Ivoire, etc.). But for this to take place, the fear must be overcome that dealing with these groups confers on them underserved respectability and legitimacy. Obviously, that is a risk that needs to be managed, the overriding interest being to minimise civilian suffering and general destruction.20

A question that comes to mind when dealing with armed non-state actors is whether they can be held to account for violations regarding human rights in the areas of their operation, considering that they are not signatory to any treaty relating to the conduct of combatants. This has had the effect of making some of the insurgents virtual outlaws.21 The Somali case is instructive on a number of issues. In a situation where for about two decades now there has been no central authority, the country having been carved up into fiefdoms run by warlords, the problem of security, especially for the weaker clans (such as the minority Bantu and the low status Yibir, Tumal and Midgaan) has been central to any discussion of that long running crisis. The norm has for a long time been that the stronger clans will lord it over the weaker clans and take from them practically whatever they want, including land and famine relief food, apart from virtually enslaving and holding them on their farms.22

18 Ibid
19 Ibid
20 Ibid
21 Ken Menkhaus, Warlords and Landlords: Non State Actors and Humanitarian Norms in Somalia (Draft) Davidson College
22 Ibid
Violence against women and children, including kidnappings and rape, is very common in such a situation of pervasive lawlessness. In the absence of a structured state, the different Somali clans have resorted to traditional ways of regulating life, securing the little they can in terms of order and settling disputes among themselves.

Traditional institutions such as xeer (customary law enforced by clan elders) and diya (blood money) for such egregious offences as murder, rape and theft, have been resurrected and they seem to be working well in some of the communities long used to total breakdown of law and order. In addition, there is greater realization of the strength that can be marshaled if the smaller and weaker clans come together and organize self-defense strategies against the larger and more powerful clans. This has meant not only that the smaller clans, the natural prey of the bigger ones before, can no longer be taken for granted, but also that this inter-clan solidarity might in the future provide a basis for a Somali-bred drive for peace and unity, though this must remain a distant aspiration.

5.3 Outreach Limited, Funding Doubtful, Legitimacy Contested

After dealing with the major groups of non state actors and described some of their salient features, let us now examine some of the problems that hamper their operations and limit their efficaciousness. Quite importantly, there exist strong feelings of mutual suspicion between African states and NGOs and other non-state actors. African states generally mistrust NGOs and other non-state actors for a variety of reasons. These include the suspicion that many NGOs are ‘invading’ traditionally government territory, arrogating to themselves roles that are the preserve of states, thus, undermining their authority and discrediting them. The fact that most of these non-state actors do not have their own funding and have to rely on foreign funding has led to suspicion as to their real motivation, the suspicion being that they are really “Trojan Horses” doing the bidding of their funders, who may have interests inimical to those of their states. Indeed, one study of non-state actors in Uganda, Ghana and South Africa found that, “The ability of most African civil society organisations to generate adequate funds from indigenous sources is generally constrained by relatively low levels of industrialisation. The middle classes are often key actors in the formation and staffing of civil society organisations but . . . they lack the wealth and commitment to provide the resources for running costs through donations or structured fund-raising efforts”.

It is worth noting that a new impetus was given to the role of non-state actors by the 2000 Cotonou Agreement, which spelled out the relationship between the European Union, African states and non-state actors, predating continued EU financial support for development on increased participation of non-state actors. Governments and other state structures have a way of going about their activities, and non-state actors, not being governmental departments, have their own way of doing things, often less structured and informal, and this has led to misunderstandings and working at cross purposes. Basically, governments question the legitimacy of non-state actors, especially the fact that they have not been mandated by any recognised, representative authority, they are not elected and do not report to anybody apart from their own internal mechanisms, which are themselves suspect in the eyes of government.

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23 ibid
24 Mark Robinson and Steven Friedman, Civil society and aid in Africa, IDS Discussion Paper 383, April 2005
Many non-state actors, including NGOs, are led by urban-based, educated elites, many with a political axe to grind as they may have been excluded from the mainstream of political activity and, in the eyes of governments, tend to be mere fault finders without any positive contribution to make to the development effort. It would be a mistake to think that these suspicions concerning the role of non-state actors are the preserve of African states and their agents, because even non-state actors have questioned aspects of their roles. For instance, Shivji, a non-state actor par excellence, posits that the surge in NGO and other civil society activism on the continent is part of a neo-liberal onslaught aimed at undermining the state democratisation process by privileging fragmented action at the expense of any project to overhaul the entire governance systems that are really vestiges of a colonial past:

“Imperialism under the name of globalisation is making a comeback while refurbishing its moral and ideological image. NGOs were born in the womb, and knowingly or otherwise are participating in the imperial project, or at least in the process of refurbishing its image. No doubt, there are very fine and dedicated people in the NGOs who are genuinely committed to the struggle to better the world. But there are serious blind spots and silences in the NGO discourse which objectively result in the NGO world participating in the imperial, rather than the national, project. For, NGOs cannot be pro-people and pro-change without being anti-imperialist and anti-status quo.”25

Writing in the *Sunday Mirror* (Harare) Mabasa Sasa tackles the role of Northern NGOs in the growing NGO industry in Africa, giving the example of the American think-tank, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), which he says “were created so that they would, in turn, create subsidiary civic bodies they would do their dirty foreign affairs work the American state Department could not be seen doing by the public” He quotes William Blum’s *Rogue State: A Guide to the World’s Only Superpower*. The idea was that the NED would do, somewhat overtly what the CIA had been doing for decades, and thus, hopefully, eliminate the stigma associated with CIA covert activities.26 From a different angle, another, commentator posits the near irrelevance of NGOs. Writing in *The Economist*, John Grimmond talks of “NGOs and their selected agendas,. woolly-minded people,. riddled with ethnocentric assumptions developed in conditions that don’t exist anywhere in the contemporary world… no longer based on any coherent theory or principles.. an ideological rendez-vous for erstwhile antagonists.. ineffective as a model for social and political practice…”27

For their part, non-state actors suspect that governments are executing a ‘hidden agenda’ without regard to the real interests of the people, or tend to ignore those who have been excluded from political processes by, say, ethnically based systems. With rampant corruption, graft, nepotism and favouritism in most African states, the belief that government agents are given to self seeking is quite strong. Governments are viewed as inefficient and, by their very nature, unable to cover the interests and concerns of all their constituents, thus, leaving huge gaps that must be serviced by focused groups that relentlessly apply themselves to specific areas of activity in which they have built strong affinities and competencies. Particular mention is made of roles that can be played by non-state actors in areas where the government ability to act meaningfully is heavily constrained. In Chad, which has known long

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25 Shivji, supra
27 *The Economist, The World in 2002*
periods of instability, with a succession of fragile governments, is weighed down by rebellions and the presence of huge foreign economic interests that have often acted against the interests of local populations, we find an interesting demonstration of what civil society can do. In order to counteract the effects of unchecked exploitation of the oil resources of the country and the opaque practices in the disposal of the revenues accruing to the government from this economic activity, communities living in the oil producing areas came together to form the *Entente des Populations des Zones Petrolieres* with the specific goal of monitoring state expenditure of oil revenues.28 To link up the different interests of Chadian civil society at the national level, an overarching umbrella organisation, l’*Organisations des Acteurs Non-Etatiques du Tchad* (OANET) was formed, which coordinates and harmonises the activities of different players in various civil service fields and gives a united voice.

In Burundi, another country which has had more than its fair share of bloody conflict, another example emerges of what non-state actors can do in a situation of instability and near state collapse. Within the framework of the Great Lakes Policy Forum (GLPF), bringing together international organizations, governmental and non-governmental agencies, business leaders and the media to find ways of building sustainable peace and preventing further bloodshed, a number of activities were undertaken, including confidence building measures across the ethnic divide29. Activities included forming inter-ethnic women and youth groups to support the peace efforts spearheaded, first by Julius Nyerere and later by Nelson Mandela in Arusha and Dar es Salaam. Pivotal in this enterprise was the role played by a civil society radio station, *Studio Ijambo*, which produced “a wide mix of radio programmes that addresses the daily issues confronting Burundians in a manner that promotes dialogue, reconciliation and peace building, using common ground journalism techniques,” a far cry from the nefarious role played by *Radio Mille Colines* in the 1994 genocide in neighbouring Rwanda.

Another interesting experience can be garnered from South Africa, with the work done by civil society organizations in ensuring public safety in a generalized situation of insecurity during the transition from Apartheid to democratic governance. Although the new ANC government had, since 1994, put in place legislative measures intended to bolster public safety, such as the National Crime Prevention Strategy, crime rates soared. In 1999 a South African NGO, *U Managing Conflict* (UMAC), which had been founded in 1985 at the height of insecurity and violence all too often instigated by the Apartheid regime, set to work to translate policy and legislation into action, including monitoring violence. Working in close collaboration with local authorities and interacting with other civil society organisations, UMAC helped launch the Community Safety Forum project, involving community policing that helped to radically reduce violent crime in several notoriously dangerous places. The success of UMAC’s work is attributed to the commitment of the organisation’s leadership and the support accorded them by local authorities.30

With varying degrees of success, examples abound on the continent of organizations of civil society that have made a mark on their communities, whether it be in organizing community safety, policy advocacy or provision of services.

28 Non-State actors in Chad—Turning natural partners into allies, Carlsson, C. 2003, Maastricht: ECDPM
29 Amr Abdalla and Susan Collin Mark, *Multifaceted Programming: Influencing Policies in Burundi*, in NGOs At the Table, supra
30 Sean Tait, *Impacting on Policing Policy: South Africa*, in NGOs at the Table, supra
5.4 Conclusion and the Way Forward

We have already seen above a few examples of how NSAs can play a significant role by intervening in areas where the formal state has not been able to provide certain public goods. One area we have noted is security and public safety, not only in failed states, such as Somalia, but also in areas within a national polity where pockets of insecurity have seriously challenged State capacity to deal with security issues such as we have noted in the case of Burkina Faso and South Africa. Equally, we have shown how civil society bodies, such as the Burundian radio station, can help to foster civic responsibility by propagating norms of civility and good neighbourliness. These interventions have proven effective in facing up to challenges that the State cannot handle.

In addition to security and public safety, NSAs have been lending the State a helping hand by making salutary interventions in service provision. A good example of this point is South Africa, essentially because the long years of Apartheid and the neglect of service provision to non-White communities made the latter more attuned to self-reliance and better positioned to devise their own programmes to take care of their problems, a culture that has been taken on board by the post-Apartheid South Africa.

In Malawi, with a much poorer government and weaker capacity, cooperation between the state and NSAs has also proved useful in the provision of essential services. Nigeria offers an interesting contrast because, even with abundant resources, the trend has not been in favour of privileging private or non state actors, especially when these are small in size and acting in small geographical areas. Instead, larger organizations, mainly state and parastatal ones, are accorded priority.

Turning to another sector, agriculture, where the African state has been relinquishing its erstwhile domination of farmers’ cooperatives, two examples may suffice to show what can be achieved when NSAs, organized around autonomous farmers’ associations, are given space for action, providing services to their constituents in the fields of extension, research and marketing. In Benin, for long under a heavily centralized economy, the gradual withdrawal of the state has given rise to a powerful and delivering farmers’ association, the Federation des Unions des Producteurs du Benin (FUPRO), while in Rwanda the Reseau des Organisations Paysanne du Rwanda (ROPARWA) offers similar services to producers of potatoes. Both these organizations work in close collaboration with government agencies that provide research and other services, while keeping in close touch with the farmers, advising them on best farming practices and looking out for their interests at the level of marketing and pricing. These are but few examples out of many that can be found across the African continent. They all attest to the fact that room exists for close and productive cooperation between the state and non state actors, and that where this cooperation thrives, both sectors stand to gain.

Despite the continued mistrust that exists between governments and non-state actors, there is clearly room for them both to play their roles in bringing about changes for the better in the lives of their

31 Larbi George, Promoting Synergies Between Non State Providers of Public Services and the State in Nigeria, 26th Roundtable Conference of the African Association for Public Administration and Management (AAPAM), Mombasa, March, 2007.

constituents, as long as they can learn to respect each other and find common ground for their work. Civil society organisations cannot supplant government, because the role of government in governing, legislation and provision of overall security cannot be obviated but, likewise, government cannot cover all aspects of governance and development. Concerted action is called for here. It is important to note the novelty of the activities undertaken by non-state actors, which have seen new resurgence only over the past two decades or so, but it is also worth noting, as does Mabogunje, that “in most African countries, even the state itself is an institution in the process of evolving. Soon after Independence, it was assumed that development and unity required strong, highly centralised governments and that local governing institutions were mainly of distracting significance…Unity was confused with uniformity and all opinions contrary to those expressed by the state and its officials are regarded as threatening.” On the other hand, as observes Bashaw, “there is an obvious danger in developing a myth about NGOs on the sole assumption that they can be trusted simply because they are different from the state.” Indeed even the efficaciousness of these organizations has been questioned, as seen earlier. The 1993 UNDP Report raises the question as to the measure of success of these organizations, answering it with a sobering reflection: “Nobody really knows. What seems clear is that even people helped by successful (NGO) projects remain poor.”

In “The relationship Between the State and the Voluntary Sector”, John Clark explores principal ways in which states can influence the operational environment for NGOs:

- a) The nature and quality of governance (pluralism, accountability).
- b) Legal frameworks (registration, reporting requirements)
- c) Taxation policies (imported goods, local philanthropy)
- d) Public consultation and information
- e) Coordination
- f) Official support (government funding, contracts).

In order for non-state actors to have a real impact on governance processes in their countries, they have to show that they themselves conform to the basic norms of good governance, transparency and accountability by respecting their constitutions and ensuring probity in their financial affairs. It is no good for groups of unelected citizens to point fingers at wrongdoing in government when they cannot account for their own activities. An interesting piece of advice is given as to how NGOs should behave for their advocacy work to be effective. Former US Ambassador John W. MacDonald, drawing on his long experience working with NGOs, advised them to take the following factors into account when dealing with interlocutors in the public sector:

- a) Take cognizance of the differences in approach between state and non-state actors, styles and modes of operations.
- b) Take into consideration the factor time: Many state actors want results to show ‘on their watch’

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33 Mabogunje, supra
34 Bashaw, supra
35 UNDP Report, 1993
36 John Clark, The Global Development Research Centre, October 1993
37 Ambassador John Mac Donald, A View from another World—The policymaker’s Perspective, Foreword to NGOS at the Table, supra,
c) Let them take short-term credit for ‘instant’ success, and you can have long term change in policy

d) Work through personal contacts, seek the face-to-face encounters as they tend to last and have greater impact than faxes and emails.

It takes two to tango, as the adage goes, and here it is imperative for both state and non-state actors to know that the only acceptable finality of their intervention is the improved wellbeing of the people that they serve. In the ongoing democratization process, this is the desired outcome and both sets of actors must never lose sight of this.

Whereas the state and its various agencies, including the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary, need formal structures of state in bringing about that democratisation, if they do not seriously engage civil society, their efforts will amount to little more than formalistic democratization, what Nzongola-Ntalaja has termed the “caricatural identification of democracy” a far cry from the “realisation of democratic principles of governance in practice and the balance of social forces.”

At all levels of national life, and throughout the processes of national socio-economic development, it is imperative that all the vital forces of the nation be taken on board, allowed to contribute fully and be listened to. Hence the importance of getting the views of all stakeholders in the national development processes, from conception, to planning, implementation and evaluation.

An example of what non state actors can do to input into these processes is offered by the South African Women’s Budget Initiative, which involves representatives of women’s organizations in national budgeting processes, and in which women have been keen to assert their views and make sure that “budgets follow policy, and not vice versa”, advocating “expenditures that promote equity within public service,” calling for a “gendered budget” and suggesting ways of “trimming the fat”, i.e. curbing wasteful expenditure in government. It is gratifying to note that many African countries are adopting the practice of letting non state actors take part in pre-budget dialogues.

38 George Nzongola-Ntalaja, The State and Democracy in Africa
It has been stated that, whereas government must continue to provide the overall policy orientation and regulatory environment, as well setting the rules by which the various actors must play, “civil society actors are necessary to build bridges between the alienated and marginalised and various levels of government,” because “governments often lack the necessary ‘inroads’ at the community level effectively to understand or to address local risks, while community action and local knowledge are in many cases still poorly integrated into the overall governance structures and resources at the local, district, regional and national levels.” There is therefore need to harmonise the action of local communities and the private sector with government resources. In the one specific area of the private sector, it may be useful to refer to a solicitous quote from a quintessential state actor who should know:

“In many areas of public responsibility, the private sector is better able to deliver effective services, often because of the dynamics of competition, or because it generally has advanced technical or risk management capacity. By bringing private capital and expertise into state enterprises, we gain access to technology and skills transfer, as well as to the capital needed for expansion and organizational renewal.”


41 Trevor Manuel, South African Minister of Finance, (Department of Finance, 2000).