

CIVIL SOCIETY AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN SOUTH AFRICA

A research conducted for the
Fondation Maison des Science de L'Homme,
Paris, France

By Ndangwa Noyoo

1. INTRODUCTION

South Africa emerged twelve years ago, from a long history of racial discrimination that was translated, over decades, into the manner in which blacks were denied access to basic human needs, and also how they could not participate in the economic, and political processes of their own country. For generations, African communities remained on the margins of society and were only perceived as sources of cheap labour for the apartheid economy. South Africa has a specific history which is entwined with the current poverty situation in the country. Indeed, this history is informed by an ideology of inequality and differences between the races. This “reality” of racial exclusion was crafted via policies and legislation that in turn informed perspectives on poverty among the different races and classes in South Africa (Magasela, 2005). In 1994, South Africa became a free democracy and was for the first time led by an African government. Thus, the humongous task of addressing and redressing apartheid’s legacy of poverty and inequality began. This effort would take on a combined approach from both the new government and civil society formations. Therefore, civil society’s role in poverty reduction in a post-apartheid South Africa was initially defined from its close association with the new government that was genuinely searching for solutions to the dilemma of poverty. However, civil society was to encounter certain challenges as it took on the responsibility of uplifting communities out of poverty in a democratic order. At this juncture, some segments of civil society seem to have reached a *cul-de-sac* in their poverty reduction campaigns, due to a number of variables. To this effect, the present research study was undertaken in order to shed more light on the roles of civil society in poverty reduction. It was envisaged that an exercise of this nature could begin to proffer future policy options for the sector, and also aid in bolstering its roles and responsibilities in the fight against poverty in post-apartheid South Africa.

1.1. *Rationale and objective of the study*

The rationale of the research was based on the need to find out how civil society formations were engaged in poverty reduction endeavours in South Africa. The study also tried to establish clarity as to where civil society organisations could be located in the fight against poverty post-1994. This position was influenced by the assumption that a good number of interventions, propelled by these organisations seemed not to be attaining their intended

impacts. The main objective of the study was to investigate the role of civil society in poverty reduction in South Africa.

1.2. Methodology

Mainly, in-depth interviews served as tools for gathering data. Also, an extensive literature review was undertaken to augment the study: secondary and primary sources of data were analysed, which included research reports, existing data bases, policy documents, legislation, and reports of organisations, annual reports of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and internet searches. The research was qualitative and purposive in approach, and the analysis of data was manual.

1.3. Limitations

The main limitation of the research was the non-response exhibited by certain organisations as well as individuals that were purposively sampled. However, this deficit was compensated with in-depth interviews of key persons with profound knowledge of the sphere under investigation and also the context – South Africa. One can only speculate as to why these persons were reluctant to participate in the research study. Even though anonymity was guaranteed (to those that were uncomfortable with the prospect of their names appearing in a research report), it became clear after several follow-ups through e-mails and telephone calls that certain individuals were not willing to commit themselves or their organisations to this research inquiry. However, the distance between the researcher and the context could also have played a role in this situation. Nevertheless, the study was strengthened by the investigator's thorough knowledge of the subject and local environment, after having researched, taught and published in South Africa on various social development issues – of which civil society is part - for a period of eight years.

1.4. Analytical framework

A theoretical framework for a study of this nature was of critical importance, because it served as a fulcrum for the gathering and analysing of data. Therefore a policy position - specifically social policy - was adopted as the analytical framework for the research. It was recognised in this examination that such a perspective envisions social analysis as ultimately

concerned with people's well-being and the main objective of planned development. In this way, social policy becomes a multi-institutional endeavour, whether pursued by the state, through civil society or international organisations. Therefore, in regard to poverty reduction, actions may take the form of one or a combination of either social welfare interventions and/or broader social and economic interventions designed to promote livelihoods strengthening (Hall and Midgley, 2004:100).

2. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

2.1. South Africa's poverty profile

Poverty remains a daunting challenge in South Africa after twelve years of democratic rule (Desai, 2005; Bond, 2006). A significant number of South Africans still exist on the peripheries of the country's modern economy in appalling conditions. Marginalised and vulnerable, many communities continue to face the difficult task of sustaining their livelihoods in a country that is perceived by many on the African continent, as almost "First World". The South African Human Development Report (UNDP, 2003) shows that about 48.5 per cent of the South African population (21.9 million people) falls below the national poverty line of (48.5 per cent) – however, as it will be shown later – the definition of poverty or the poverty line in South Africa, is still in contention. Nonetheless, the Report also points out that poverty has been exacerbated by a highly skewed distribution of wealth, extremely steep earning inequality, weak access to basic services by the poor, unemployment and underemployment, low economic growth rates and the weakening employment generation capacity of the existing growth path, environmental degradation, HIV/AIDS and an inadequate social security system (UNDP, 2003:6). Furthermore, unemployment is also cause for concern.

Statistics South Africa's Labour Force Survey (LFS) of 2004, reports the official national unemployment rate as sitting at 26.2 per cent. Of the country's 15 million economically active individuals, 11.6 million were employed in September as compared to 11.4 million in March 2004. Gauteng continued to be the biggest employer among South Africa's provinces, with KwaZulu-Natal second, while the Western Cape showed a slight decrease in employment due to drought. Unemployment is treated in this research as one causality of poverty, because the assumption is that at least employment enables one to have income, that in turn allows a

person to purchase certain commodities that may sustain his/her livelihood. Despite a general rise in employment ratios during this period, some analysts have countered that there is a general decline of employment especially in the mining, manufacturing and farming sectors where jobs are continuously shed at alarming rates. Although welcome, “most of these new jobs are mostly badly paid and casual” (Makgetla, 2005:1).

South Africa’s poverty portrait would be incomplete if mention was not made of the land question. Landlessness of the majority Africans can be traced back to the *Natives Land Act of 1913* that legitimised the dispossession of land from the indigenous people by a settler European population. It should be noted, however, that this piece of legislation was a culmination of antecedent violent acts of conquest by Europeans bent on driving Africans off their land for several centuries. After passing the Act, millions of black people were forced to leave their ancestral lands and resettle in what quickly became over-crowded and environmentally degraded reserves or $\frac{1}{3}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$ $\frac{5}{8}$ - $\frac{5}{8}$ pools of cheap migrant labour for white-owned farms and mines were sourced. These areas were barren and unproductive agriculturally, and were only 13 per cent of the total landmass of the country even though designated for 75 per cent of the population. Under the *Native Trust and Land Act, 1936*, black people further lost the right to purchase land in the reserves and were obliged to utilise land administered by tribal authorities appointed by the government (Department of Land Affairs, 1997). After 1994, the ANC government undertook measures to redress landlessness in the country under a new land policy whose central thrust was the land reform programme. The programme rests upon three components: land restitution, land redistribution and tenure reform (Department of Land Affairs, 1997).

Again, the land reform initiative seems to have stalled and critics point to the ineffectual underpinning philosophy of the government’s land reform to serving the landless poor:

Land reform is framed by a constitutional commitment by which government must respect and protect existing property rights. This “property rights” clause means that land will only become available on a ‘willing buyer - willing seller’ basis, and further guarantees that existing land-owners will be compensated - at market rates – for any privately owned land the government targets for land redistribution. In establishing the legal framework within which land reform would occur, the constitution gave force and effect to a continued racially skewed pattern of land ownership established over centuries of colonisation and apartheid. This constitutional commitment has

placed real legal and financial constraints on a potentially far-reaching programme of land redistribution. Instead of bringing about substantive changes in land distribution, the land reform programme – as far as the poor and landless rural communities are concerned - serves to further reproduce a legacy of racially-based discrimination and oppression (Hargreaves, 2001:1).

As suggested above, the land reform programme has also failed to escape the trappings of neoliberalism (For detailed critiques, see for instance Thwala, 2003; Greensberg, 2004; Bond 2005; Mngxitama, 2005). Landlessness compounds poverty in the manner that it impedes communities, especially in the rural areas, to have recourse to a source of livelihood through farming. It curtails poor people's ability to use land as a reproductive asset. Also, hunger could be reduced if people produced their own crops for consumption and then marketed the surplus.

The above outlined poverty scenario is also intertwined with the country's inequality levels that continue to be a worrisome feature of post-apartheid South Africa. Inequality remains crucial in the debate of poverty reduction and should not be glossed over by both civil society, and government in strategies for intervention. The *Poverty and Inequality in South Africa 2004-2014 Report*, focusing on prevailing trends and future policy options, by Landman et. al., (2003:3) notes that inequality and poverty should not be treated as one thing. It further observes that in “public discourse the two issues - poverty and inequality - are normally linked and treated as an expression of the same problem. In reality, they are very different. These differences have important public policy consequences.” The aforementioned differences hinge on the fact that inequality is reflected by the Gini coefficient - which measures the distribution of a country's national income. For instance, in a perfectly equal society, 10 per cent of the population will receive 10 per cent of the income; 20 per cent of the population will receive 20 per cent of income, and so on. The Gini coefficient varies between 0 and 1 - the closer to 1, the more unequal a society; the closer to 0, the more equal a society (Landman et. al., 2003). While on the other hand, poverty is not so straightforward because its measurement is dependent on a critical assumption: what level of income constitutes the poverty line? Thus, even a society with a low level of poverty may still have a high level of inequality. Also, a fairly equal society may still have a high level of poverty (Landman et. al., 2003).

After political freedoms were accorded to South Africans in 1994, the government began to grapple with the question of poverty in different ways.¹ Some strategies were criticised and cited as unsustainable, while others were commended. Despite certain shortcomings, government interventions have been refined in the last decade. What is worthy of note, however, is the manner in which the government attenuated the role of civil society in the foregoing arena. Just prior to attaining power and shortly afterwards, the ANC had interacted with civil society in the drafting of policies and legislation for a democratic order. The culture then was one of inclusivity. What was central to all such policies and legislation was the need to radically address the country's poverty. Past policies and laws that had entrenched social inequities and inequalities were repealed. Many of them had specifically blocked Africans from advancing in areas like business, education and employment. After taking over the reigns of government, some prominent members of civil society were even co-opted into its fold. Nevertheless, this situation would drastically change when the government began to isolate civil society in various decision-making processes. It can be argued though, that government's ambiguous position in this regard and in poverty reduction as well, stems from its ideological ambivalence sorely created by the pursuit of neo-liberalism and an abdication of certain ideals of the liberation struggle. At the outset, almost all poverty reduction interventions were guided by an ambitious programme for social reconstruction known as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). The RDP was more egalitarian and did

¹ This is not the first time that poverty was prioritised by both a South African government and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs). Nonetheless, as a point of departure, it must be underlined that it would be the first time that the problem was tackled from a non-racial perspective. In 1928, at the instigation of the Dutch Reformed Church, the government persuaded the Carnegie Corporation of New York to undertake a study to investigate white indigence. This was referred to as: *A scientific investigation into the causes of White poverty, its extent, and the means by which it could be reduced*. Thereafter, reasons for the establishment of a formalised welfare system would emanate from the "National Conference on the Poor White Problem" which took place at Kimberley in 1934, (following the Carnegie research) and resulted in 1937 in the creation of a State Department of Social Welfare, that employed social workers as well as subsidised similar posts in the voluntary sector [See: McKendrick, B.W. 1987. The development of social welfare and social work in South Africa, In B.W. McKendrick (Ed.), **Introduction to Social Work and Social Welfare in South Africa**. (pp.5-19). Pretoria: HAUM; Hare, I., and McKendrick, B., (1976). South Africa: Racial Divisions In Social Services, In D Thursz, and J.L Vigilante (Eds.), **Meeting Human Needs, (Volume 2): Additional Perspectives From Thirteen Countries**. (pp.71-96). Beverly Hills, CA.: SAGE Publications; Wilson, F., and Ramphele, M., 1989. **Uprooting Poverty**. Cape Town: David Philip.].

not shy away from the idea of wealth redistribution. It focused on four broad areas namely: meeting basic needs, building the economy, democratising the state and society, and developing human resources and nation-building (African National Congress, 1994). Key underlying objectives of the RDP were to deal with social legacies of apartheid (Manuel, 2004).

A dramatic turn around, by government, took place in 1996 when it adopted the Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) macro economic framework, which would in effect dim the fortunes of poor people as it essentially alienated them from the country's economy. GEAR sought after the stabilisation of the economy through *inta alia*: an attraction of foreign direct investment, higher domestic savings, industrial competitiveness and tighter fiscal policy, moderation of wage increases and major expansion of private investment (Government of the Republic of South Africa, 1996), at the expense of poverty reduction. Despite projections of employment creation, GEAR delivered the opposite, i.e., the shedding of jobs in the first year of implementation. Its envisaged new jobs of 126, 000 in 1996 in fact resulted in the economy losing 71, 000 and 42, 000 in the first quarter of 1997. Job loses occurred in manufacturing, construction and mining (Marais, 1997). GEAR would be remembered as a turning point whereby government did not seek wide consultation over the conceptualisation of this new macro economic strategy and shunning civil society's input in the process. From then onwards, civil society would be ignored by the government in important national decisions. For instance and not too long ago, civil society was excluded by government even when arriving at the country's Millennium Development Goals' Report.² Some critics (notably COSATU – Congress of South African Trade Unions) have also pointed out that globalisation and the ANC's shift to neo-liberalism have not only exacerbated poverty in the country, but isolated it from the masses. Globalisation may be treated as an exogenous phenomenon and probably in certain instances; nothing can be done in containing its onslaught. However, what worries many South African commentators, especially from the Left, is that the latter position is self-imposed and smacks a betrayal of the liberation struggle. The Minister of Finance argues that government has since moved away from a broad strategic statement on poverty reduction and earmarking funding for poverty relief. Instead, it has opted to adjust its overall orientation within a broad fiscal stance that seeks to maximise available

² See: **South Africa Civil Society Speaks**. A Summary based on civil society's commentary on the South African government's Millennium Development Goals' Country Report by the People's Budget Campaign on www.sangoco.org.

resources for social and economic expenditure without compromising the sustainability of the growth of those resources (Manuel, 2004:3). He further makes government's case by observing that the composition of expenditure has been adjusted to focus resources at direct and indirect mechanisms of poverty relief, while maintaining a balance between expenditure that supports people's ability to engage in productive economic activity such as education, housing, transport, skills development, economic services and infrastructure, and providing direct, welfare-type, support – for example, cash grants, school feeding, and food relief. The former as well as the strengthening of the poor's assets through land reform were identified as important (Manuel, 2004:3).

Indeed, there have been positive strides made by the ANC since 1994, and all is not doom and gloom. For example, the government has endeavoured to mainstream marginalised groups in the national economy such as people with disabilities, women, and rural communities. Certain actions involved the passing of Affirmative Action laws and Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) legislation so that black people could be enabled to participate in the formal economy. It also worked hard to transform the sectors of education, health and social welfare, among others. In social welfare, for instance, pre-1994 policies governing the sector were informed by racial exclusion and inequality. The white population group accessed better and well-resourced social services as opposed to the blacks, "coloureds" (people of mixed race descent), and Indians. In the past, the welfare policy only aimed at entrenching socio-economic privileges of the white population in line with the operating political doctrine of apartheid that sought to differentiate races on various criteria. The operating procedures of the welfare policy were also fragmented along racial and ethnic lines, with specific welfare departments meeting the needs of each race or ethnic group (Department of Social Welfare, 1997). Services were inappropriate, inaccessible, and discriminatory to the vast majority of South Africans. Needless to say, the instruments of racial segregation, fashioned by the National Party government in 1948, had to be dismantled in 1994. Thereafter, a paradigm shift also had to be instituted in the welfare system, so that it could respond effectively to the needs of all South Africans in a way that was equal and just.³ However there are still serious transformative challenges still facing the welfare sector such as moving beneficiaries from dependency to empowerment as well as institutional incapacities. Despite government's efforts to bolster the welfare system so as to help the economically excluded, the key problem

³ Adapted from the author's Ph.D Thesis: **Social Welfare Policy, Social Work Practice and Professional Education in a Transforming Society: South Africa** (2003). Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

remains that many people fall completely outside the welfare net, being entitled neither to child grants nor unemployment pay nor pensions (Mail and Guardian, 2003). Even though groundbreaking work has been undertaken in policy and legislative transformation, the main challenge presented by the South African transition has been the process of translating new policy development by government, into direct service delivery to impoverished South Africans (Simpson, 1998).

Noble, et al., (2004), argue that the way poverty is tackled in post-apartheid South Africa should be informed by the way it is measured. They assert that it is imperative to arrive at a rigorous distinction between the conceptualisation, definition and measurement of poverty in the country. In this way, strategies against poverty would be informed by a theoretical position. The World Bank (2006) seems to echo this point. For the Bank, it means that the choices that are made in relation to poverty reduction, for instance, would have been influenced by how poverty was measured at the outset. Noble and associates, wondered why South Africa had not yet adopted any official definition of poverty, to work from, by 2004. This situation could have had a bearing on the way poverty reduction strategies were formulated and executed. Magasela (2005:3) also argues that there is need for South Africa to adopt an official poverty line. He further observes that adopting an official poverty line in South Africa “requires that issues around the nature, understanding and meaning of poverty in post-1994 be brought to the fore, discussed and considered.” Magasela, (2006), further opines that the intractable nature of poverty is exacerbated by the non-existence of an overriding or overarching poverty reduction framework of government. He explains: “Government needs a definitive document that analyses the conditions of South Africa’s poverty – in its multidimensional nature – that departments can then work from, rather than working in silos. The cluster system has no room for the participation and input of civil society in the formulation of policy aimed at poverty reduction.” Noble and colleagues (2004) are of the view that the most appropriate definition of poverty, which is consistent with democratic South Africa and the transformation agenda, should be based on a consensual approach. In this case, the consensual approach is relative poverty defined by reference to socially perceived necessities in terms of activities, possessions and access to services. They conclude that even though there are some difficulties associated with this perspective, it will address long-term goals of an inclusive, unified, multi-cultural society (Noble, et al., 2004).

The role of CSOs in poverty reduction is still a disputed issue twelve years into democracy. While it is recognised that government alone cannot fight poverty, it should nonetheless take the lead and spur on civil society's efforts. But actors in civil society on the other hand should also not fold their arms and wait for the government to prod them into action. It has been pointed out that many organs in civil society face enormous challenges, and this could be partial reason why they are unable to respond to the challenges of poverty as they lack internal capacity. Kotze (2003) refers to the problem at hand as the lack or the inability of most CSOs to move from discourse to action. He also refers to the post-1994 era as crisis years as far as civil society is concerned. He argues that many organisations - for a variety of reasons – lost their political and intellectual initiatives/edge, and were caught up in the demands of donors – and government driven “development” agendas. NGO staff participated in many workshops and meetings, both amongst themselves and with government and donors. He further contends that the discourse was rapidly changing along with the radical shift in economic priorities and policies, but since it remained broadly cast in the familiar terminology of “development” and poverty alleviation, not many seemed to notice. Sooka (2005) also touches on the supposed inertia of the sector and observes that although poverty and inequality constitute the biggest threats to South Africa's fledgling democracy, these twin peril do not receive the attention they deserve from civil society.

Many commentators have pointed to the way civil society has been groping in the dark after the fall of apartheid. One area that contributes significantly to this problem is said to be the theoretical grounding of civil society post-1994.⁴ However, in all fairness, civil society formations have not been idle. They have been instrumental in important initiatives such as the “speak out against poverty”⁵ campaign that was spearheaded by the South African National NGO Coalition (SANGOCO).⁶

⁴ Progressive civil society - because there are certain sections which might not necessarily fit into this – suffers from a major conceptual weakness, especially in the understanding and utility of data. From an ideological and philosophical position it does not seem to look beyond the data. There is also an overemphasis on the qualitative over the quantitative. People who know numbers will go beyond the data while progressive civil society will adopt an ethical position in order to defend itself.although there is no shortage of research institutions doing research out there such as the Human Science Research Council etc...the weakness is in the value and utility of data.....in policy it is a major weakness. The policy realm is about measurability and quantifying of indicators...when you enter the policy realm you need this (Marais, 2006).

⁵ The Speak out on Poverty campaign “aimed to provide a platform to both understand the legacy of social and economic rights violation and the extent to which the Bill of Rights in the Constitution addressed this legacy. A joint initiative by the South African National NGO Coalition (SANGOCO), the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) and the Commission on Gender Equity (CGE), Speak out on Poverty provided a unique opportunity to listen to the experiences and opportunities of the poor. Ten nation-wide hearings were held over 35 days from 31 March to 19 June 1998. One of the social and economic rights was selected as the primary theme for the seven hearings. The remaining were non-thematic open hearings. Nearly 600 people made oral

3. The notion of civil society

The usage of the term “civil society” has become ubiquitous in activist or academic parlance, and seems to have gained popularity towards the end of the last century. For some, it has established itself as a significant, even paradigmatic concept in the field of policy and practice (Howell and Pearce, 2002). Such views are not out of context if the profound and far-reaching transformations that transpired around the world, before the turn of the twenty-first century are considered. Most of these changes can be ascribed to civil society. Indeed, preceding the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, there had already been popular struggles in Latin America against military dictatorships in the 1960s and 1970s, propelled by civil society formations. However, the end of the cold war and the collapse of the Soviet empire were crescendos that brought to the surface, the unprecedented power of civil society to effect regime change. Equally, the rise of democratic formations in Africa, which precipitated the demise of tyrannical governments, went on to highlight the fact that there was really a burgeoning civil society around the globe that could bring about fundamental transformations. While it is true that the idea of civil society was readily embraced in many countries in the last century, it is not something novel as it has been in existence for several centuries. Nevertheless, what is poignant in the present epoch is the centrality of civil society in the development debate and how it is perceived as an agent of change, or gatekeeper of democratic processes. Opening up of spaces that were hitherto restricted by overbearing and oppressive political systems for contestation has now become the hallmark of civil society. But should civil society be perceived only in this light? Khilnani (2001:17) cautions against having a restrictive position in regard to civil society and also warns against its perceived novelty by stressing that “restrictions on historical perspectives have promoted confusion in contemporary

submissions and over 10, 000 people participated in the process either, making written submissions, attending the hearings or mobilising others to participate. ” Cited from Liebenberg, S., and Pillay, K., (1998). **Economic and Social Rights Report. SANGOCO’s Report on Poverty and Human Rights.** Johannesburg: Human Rights Commission. The Poverty hearings culminated in the **War on Poverty Declaration**, which now forms the basis of SANGOCO’s campaigns, international works, and other activities (Quoted from the website of SANGOCO – www.sangoco.org.za).

⁶ SANGOCO is an umbrella body of South African NGOs consisting of provincial and sectoral affiliates formed in 1995 to “co-ordinate NGO input into government policy and to ensure that the rich traditions of civil society - forged in the resistance to apartheid - continued to serve the people of South Africa” (SANGOCO, 2006).

understanding, which instinctively tend to define civil society in opposition to the state and to propose a zero-sum game between the two.”

There exists a plethora of definitions of the term civil society, emanating from different bodies of knowledge, as well as spanning various disciplines and ideological traditions. This discussing will not delve into these definitions as such an exercise is for another study. Suffice to say, civil society’s definition is not a value free exercise and is dependent on one’s ideological orientation or philosophical leaning. Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that the way in which civil society is defined will ultimately influence its perceived utility and roles. To analysts like Helmut Anheier – notwithstanding the various definitions of civil society – it is the fact that there is a relative absence of systematic empirical analysis of what civil society actually is and what its contours are. He argues that social scientists, policy-makers and practitioners alike, have not yet found the conceptual and methodological repertoire that is adequate for discussing civil society in ways similar to how they would debate the state of the economy or the performance of government for example (Anheier, 2004:3). Over centuries this terrain has been heavily contested with Hegel, Marx and Engels stressing its material dimensions, de Tocqueville and Ferguson laying emphasis on its organisational aspects and Gramsci⁷ delineating its ideological qualities. Thus, the history of political philosophy has suggested that dimensions of its norm-setting role are numerous and the empirical applications broader if we concentrate on only one aspect of civil society (Harbeson, 1994; Nkwanchuku, 2003). This report has adopted the definition of the Centre for Civil Society, at the London School of Economics (2004):

Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy

⁷ Gramsci brought into the equation of civil society the element of power and how it was exercised by the dominant group: “What we can do, for the moment, is to fix two major superstructural ‘levels’: the one that can be called ‘civil society’, that is, the ensemble of organisms commonly called ‘private’, and that of ‘political society’ or ‘the state’. These two levels correspond on the one hand to the functions of ‘hegemony’ which the dominant group exercises throughout society and on the other hand to that of ‘direct domination’ or command exercised through the state and ‘juridical’ government” (p.12). See Gramsci, Antonio (1971), **Selections from the Prison Notebook**, edited and translated by Quintin Hoare & Geoffrey Nowell Smith, Lawrence and Wishart, London.

and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy group.

3.1. *Global perspectives*

In the last decade, the phenomenon of *global civil society* has also become prominent, especially when globalisation is brought into sharp focus. Undoubtedly, civil society organisations have transcended national boundaries and now confront issues (once perceived in the past as local) at a global level. It is not uncommon these days for civil society networks, from different countries, to work in unison around issues of global concern for example, the rights of indigenous peoples, environment protection or debt cancellation for the developing world. These coalitions are best exemplified by the current waves of anti-globalisation campaigns, which are visible at, for instance, meetings of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In the recent past, protesters from different formations around the world have descended on these meetings to express disapproval of the WTO's neo-liberal policies and their harmful effects on principally the developing world: in December 2005, protests were mounted by these organisations in Hong Kong; also in Cancun, Mexico – 2003; in Doha, Qatar – 2001; and Seattle, USA in 1999. The expression of solidarity over a global agenda is not only confined to protest action, but to other forms of advocacy in regard to questions of social justice around the world.

The rise of global civil society has been encouraged by a multiplicity of factors as Keane (2005:1-2) describes:

These unfamiliar words 'global civil society' – a neologism of the 1990s – are fast becoming fashionable. They are born at the confluence of seven overlapping streams of concern among publicly-minded intellectuals at the end of the 1980s: the revival of the old language of civil society, especially in central-eastern Europe, after the military crushing of the Prague Spring; a heightening appreciation of the revolutionary effects of the new galaxy of satellite/computer-mediated communications (captured in Marshall McLuhan's famous neologism, 'the global village'); the new awareness,

stimulated by the peace and ecological movements, of ourselves as members of a fragile and potentially self-destructive world system; the widespread perception that the implosion of Soviet-type communist systems implied a new global order; the world-wide growth spurt of neo-liberal economies and market capitalist economies; the disillusionment with broken and unfulfilled promises of post-colonial states; and the rising concerns about the dangerous and misery producing vacuums opened up by the collapse of empires and states and the outbreak of uncivil wars.

The theoretical foundations of global civil society are quite heterogeneous and varied. Drezner (2005) alerts us to the fact that in most literature, scholars argue that the multiple components of global civil society are organised as networks characterised by voluntary, reciprocal and horizontal patterns of communication and exchange of information. In this case, therefore, different nodes of network must be able to exchange information for this type of organisations to be effective. Networks are of critical importance when it comes to the efficacy of global civil society; the denser the network, the more effective non-state actors can be (Drezner, 2005). Ironically, it is globalisation that gave impetus to the proliferation of global civil society. With declining costs in transportation and communication, the development of the Internet, e-mail and cellular phones, combined with the deregulation of air travel, the networking capacities of global civil society have been enhanced than ever (Diebert, 2000 in Drezner, 2005). For this study, Kean's conceptualisation of global civil society seems fitting. Despite this understanding, like other vocabularies with a political edge, the term's meaning is neither self-evident nor automatically free of prejudice. Moreover, current usages are quite confused (Kean, 2005).

Global civil society can have varying applications and interpretations. Kean (2005:3-4) lists several understandings and usages of global civil society, which need quoting at some length here:

- i. *Analytical-descriptive* usages of the term selectively name key institutions, actors and events, examine their complex dynamics and – using theoretical distinctions, empirical research and informed judgements – attempt to draw some conclusions about their origins, current development patterns and (unintended) consequences. Within such analyses, the concept of global civil society is used to probe either the past or the present, or both past and present simultaneously. The aim of such probes is not to recommend political

- strategies or to pass normative judgements on the world; they rather seek an explanatory understanding of the world's complex socio-political realities.
- ii.* The term global civil society also can be used as an aid to *strategic political calculation*. In this second approach, the term serves as a campaigning criterion – to establish what must be done (or what must be avoided) in order to reach goals, like freedom and justice, whose desirability is more or less presumed. Strategic uses of the term are directly concerned with political questions. They concentrate upon institutional constraints and opportunities as well as the manoeuvres of power groups and movements – upon the (potential) political gains and losses of supporters and opponents that operate from within or outside the structures of global civil society. The normative concerns that inevitably attend such “tactical” approaches are treated as a given; their main preoccupation is within the calculation of the means of achieving or stabilising civil society.
- iii.* Also, the term global civil society can be wielded as a normative *ideal*. The ethic or big idea of a global civil society is said to be warranted and plausible and desirable, and on that basis it can be used in two complementary ways: as a precautionary concept that serves to issue warnings about the undesirable or unworkable consequences of practical efforts to weaken or abolish the institutions of global civil society, for instance through unilateral military interventions or the imposition of martial law. Such precautionary usages of the norm are usually reinforced by its *advocacy* functions: gentle or strong efforts to explain and highlight the reasons why global civil society, ethically speaking, is a good thing.

3.2. *Africa's civil society*

Civil society in Africa has been described as “nascent” (Gyimah-Boadi, 1996; Aiyede, 2003) undoubtedly in reference to the fact that it is still a budding phenomenon on the continent. There are also several contending views regarding civil society in Africa, although many seem to converge under the state - civil society divide (see for example Harberson, Rothchild, and Chazan, 1994). In many instances, civil society is constantly linked to the popular democratisation processes unfolding across the continent and seen as countervailing the excesses of a predatory African state (Bayart, 1986; Gyimah-Boadi, 1996).⁸ However, it

⁸ This is not at all a mistaken notion; when examples of successful popular struggles are duly considered. The Zambian story is a case-in-point. In 1990 a groundswell of “people’s power” culminated in the dismantling of the single-party system of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) – led by the founding president of the country, Kenneth Kaunda. At the forefront, were university students who were detained under emergency laws. By 1991 this force had coalesced into a political movement – the Movement for Multi-party Democracy (MMD) bringing together under its umbrella: trade unions, academics, students, farmers, business persons, workers, the

should not be mistakenly held that African civil society is always the proponent of democracy, or is ever-knowing, benign and rational. It can also take on primordial identities and can also be destructive.

Fatton (1999) paints a grim but realistic picture of civil society in Africa in the last century, and argues that it was conflict-ridden and prone to Hobbesian wars against all. It was the prime repository of “invented” ethnic hierarchies, conflicting class visions, patriarchal domination, and irredentist identities fueling deadly conflicts in many areas of the continent. “Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars, the collapse of Somalia into ‘warlord’ violence, the ‘redictatorialisations’ of Togo, the Congo-Brazzaville, and Niger, the persisting obscenity of crude power struggles in the Congo, the killing fields of Angola and the Sudan, and the ‘ethnocides’ of Rwanda and Burundi are all very incomplete reminders of the potential ravages of an exploding and uncontrollable civil society” (Fatton, 1999:4). This position resonates with Aide’s analysis of Nigeria’s confused democratisation process. He notes that although the democratisation wave of the 1990s expanded Nigeria’s space for political expression, non-democratic elements became very visible afterwards and power seekers began to dominate the country’s political space. Thus, even though pro-democracy civic organisations in Nigeria were largely shaped by the exigencies of confronting authoritarian regimes, they became constricted in their capacity to promote democratic consolidation (Aide, 2003).

For Abé (2005), it is all about the “teething” problems of civil society which make it a “self-debilitating” actor in development. He argues that one of the very first choices made by civil society in Africa upon its “revival” was to co-habit or connive with the public sector, thus creating a situation whereby two types of civil society emerge: one structured on the basis of purely private initiatives of social actors engaged in the fight for profound change, and another that is more prominent as it is financed by the established order, created and

grassroots and former UNIP politicians opposed to Kaunda’s regime. The MMD pressurized the government to repeal “Article 14” of the Constitution that legitimised the One-Party State and outlawed plural politics in the country. Government capitulated and plural politics were ushered back into Zambian life. This situation paved the way for the MMD to be reconstituted into a formal political party and for general elections to be held in the same year. The MMD was led by Frederick Chiluba - a trade union leader - who beat Kaunda at the polls by a wide margin. However, by the time he was in his second and last term, Chiluba had become unpopular with the mass of the people. Due to this situation, he was bent on manipulating the Constitution so that it could be amended to allow him run for a “third term”. Again, it was the same progressive forces in civil society that came to the fore, to make sure that Chiluba was not allowed to amend the Constitution and entrench himself in power, against the people’s will. Chiluba is currently in court on various counts of corruption and abuse of power relating to the period whilst he was president of Zambia.

supported by the state. Now the former assertion raises serious questions regarding the autonomy of civil society, especially when we look at the broader picture of western donor agencies funding parts of civil society such as Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), in order to drive specific agendas in Africa. In a research covering three African countries by Hearn, (1999), namely: Ghana, Uganda, and South Africa, it was deciphered that the most popular civil society actors (in terms of donor funding or democracy assistance) were formal, urban-based, professional, elite advocacy NGOs. Added to this scenario, donor support was also accompanied with a certain understanding of civil society that meant the strengthening of the strategic position of this arena in relation to the state (Hearn, 1999). Here, the implication is that the setting of the development agenda becomes the preserve of donors, due to their financial muscle. Therefore, certain initiatives seen as important in the eyes of the benefactor may be prioritised over others. It might not necessarily mean that these activities result in better living conditions for poor people. Given the foregoing, what then makes civil society unique in Africa? For that matter, how should it be defined?

Hall and Trentmann (2005:21) are of the opinion that non-European or global debates about civil society are simply not a new episode. Very much to the contrary; they continue to engage with many of the problems and debates that European societies had as well, such as the relationship between inclusiveness and exclusiveness, between plurality and order, between shared religion and cultural values and toleration, and between self-governing associations and their relative dependence on states and markets. Nkwanchuku (2003) postulates that the “conventional” understanding of civil society overlooks much of what it constitutes in Africa because of its segregation of the constitutive elements of civil society into “civic and non-civic”, “traditional”, and “modern” organisations. Despite an existence of varying definitions of civil society, Nkwanchuku (2003:2) observes that one seems to be dominating the others. He asserts that this notion is “rooted in the Anglo-American tradition of liberal democratic theory, which identifies civic institutions and political activity as an essential component of the emergence of a particular type of political society based on the principles of citizenship, rights, democratic representation and the rules of law. Western donors and intellectuals have popularised this notion and many international civil society organisations tend to operate on its basis. Consequently some scholars describe it as the ‘conventional’ notion of civil society.”

Nkwanchuku (2003:2) further elaborates that because many organisations in African social formations do not meet the above criteria, some scholars and international civil society organisations assume there is no civil society organisations in Africa or that at best, they are in the formative stages. The conventional idea of civil society is critiqued by this scholar:

The problems with the ‘conventional’ notion of civil society are numerous. First, it is normatively tendentious, carrying the assumption that all societies – no matter how diverse in cultural, social and political orientation – are destined to follow a specific path of political organisation – liberalism. Second, if one accepts this notion of civil society and attempts to apply it to the analysis of actual civil societies, it may lead one into an invidious and empirically difficult exercise of deciding which civic organisations are truly ‘civil’ as opposed to those which may be dismissed as ‘pre-civil’, ‘uncivil’, ‘anti-civil’. Third, because many in African social formations do not meet the ‘civility’ criteria set by this notion; it excludes most part of Africa’s rich associational life from the civil society. Fourth, the view that organisations in the civil society must institutionalise their functions in order to secure autonomy from their members and from the state may not be realistic in Africa (Nkwanchuku, 2003:4).

Again, it is important not to follow a deterministic and reductionist route when we apply our minds to civil society in Africa. The adopted definition of civil society in this report has room for the non conventional conceptualisation of civil society in Africa. Civil society’s rich and diverse associations falling outside the parameters of the state are also catered for in the definition. After spending time in trying to understand the meaning of civil society in Africa, it is also important to shed some light on its relationship with African governments. Perhaps, the case of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) will best illustrate this point.

3.2.1. *The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD)*

African governments have been cited as having failed time after time to garner civil society formations into viable and effective partnerships for the development of the continent. A clear indictment of this unwillingness is best illustrated in the conceptualisation and crystallisation of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development or NEPAD by governments, without civil society’s involvement (Noyoo, 2003; Noyoo, 2005; Magasela, 2006). Adotei Akwei - Africa Advocacy Director for Amnesty International USA - cited in Cob (2002), at the United State’s

Congressional hearings' sub-committee on Africa, could not have aptly put it: "Nepad is a good start but there is an absence of specific details on the promotion, protection and enforcement of fundamental human rights. *Most critically, civil society was excluded during the development of Nepad. The proposal was discussed more with Western donor governments than with the very people Nepad is supposed to benefit – Africans* (Emphasis added). Akwei also called for consultation "at all levels of society" with the aim of developing a plan for the inclusion of civil society in the NEPAD process. To this day, consultation by African governments with civil society formations remains lukewarm.

No sooner had NEPAD been adopted (at the 37th session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in July 2001, in Lusaka – Zambia), than African civil society groups opposed it; many saw it as a tool for strengthening western domination over Africa (Wikipedia, 2006). Further to this, in 2002, about 40 African social movements, trade unions, youth and women's organisations, NGOs, religious organisations and similar formations, endorsed the African Civil Society Declaration, rejecting NEPAD. The views expressed in the document included the following:

- that NEPAD was mainly concerned with raising external financial resources, constituting a top-down programme relying on foreign governments, African elites, and multinational corporations, rather than starting from the people of Africa and being owned by Africans;
- that NEPAD builds on a legacy of neo-liberal structural adjustment programmes which have undermined democracy and deepened the crisis in Africa;
- that promises of good governance and democracy are intended only to satisfy foreign donors;
- that references to human rights and AIDS are too few and rhetorical to be of real importance;
- that NEPAD supports privatisation programmes which are inimical to African people's rightful ownership of African resources;
- that it will mobilise African natural resources for foreign exploitation and plunder;
- that NEPAD does not (as they believe it should) support total cancellation of external debts;
- they reject the export-led growth model on which NEPAD rests as harmful for Africa;

- that NEPAD, by promoting deeper integration into the global economic system serves the interests of the rich (Wikipedia, 2006:1).

Similar views were also endorsed by African scholars and activist intellectuals in the 2002 Accra Declaration on Africa's development (Wikipedia, 2006).

Since then, civil society organs seem to have relented somewhat. In Malawi for instance, most local civil society organisations were initially very critical of the NEPAD as well. Activists objected that the continental development plan was “top-down” having been drafted by a handful of presidents and then adopted by African leaders, without public consultation, in 2001. They complained that its accent on promoting foreign investment and trade ignored the constraints facing, especially, poor countries such as Malawi (Harsch, 2004). After some reflection, however, more than 70 such groups formed a coalition known as the Malawi Economic Justice Network (MEJN), which welcomed NEPAD as a “landmark in the process of shared aspirations for African unity.” According to one of its leading spokesperson, Dalitso Kingsley Kubalasa, the network still had reservations about the plan, but also remained “hopeful that a genuine NEPAD” could help Africans reduce poverty, achieve gender equity and attain global economic viability. Rather than “giving up on NEPAD because the process has not been ideal,” he says, Malawian civil society organisations decided instead to put forward their own suggestions for advancing NEPAD, to “make it really work” (Harsch, 2004:10).

It is surprising that the South African government that purports to champion democracy and political accountability on the continent is also an accomplice to the exclusion of civil society from the NEPAD process. NEPAD is a clear indictment of how unwilling African governments are to work collaboratively with civil society. Many governments remain suspicious of the sector and continuously label it as a political enemy.

3.3. *The South African scenario*

The rise of civil society in South Africa is inextricably bound up with the anti-apartheid struggle whose primary objective was to wrest power from an oppressive, racist and illegitimate minority regime; and many studies have explored this phenomenon (see Friedman, 1991; Noyoo, 2000;). Thus, various progressive forces with the same vision of liberating South Africa inevitably gravitated under the *anti-apartheid* umbrella. This sweep

encompassed labour, women's, civic, student, youth, human rights, church, legal, health, education, media, community advice, housing, land and other groups. Many of them functioned as "institutional" organised bases of resistance and provided much of the oppositional momentum that led to South Africa's negotiated settlement (Marais, 1998:199). At the helm of the liberation struggle was the African National Congress (ANC) and its allied partner the South African Communist Party (SACP) and in lesser degrees, the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) – a rival political entity. Due to this arrangement, the struggles of civil society organs were seen in purely instrumental terms and became incorporated into the external assault against the apartheid state. Indeed, their utility would dissolve once power was won (Marais, 1998). It goes without saying that due to the past association of civil society with the ANC in the anti-apartheid struggle, autonomy would become a contentious issue post-1994 as the ANC expected all formations that were opposed to apartheid to fold up and be incorporated into its structures. This assumption is still dogging the current relationship between the ANC and progressive social formations in civil society; those that are seen as not toeing the line are treated with distrust by the ruling party.

In trying to understand South Africa's civil society, simple categorisations of the phenomenon should be avoided at all costs, because it is also a complex issue. South African civil society has long been deemed an area for contestation, not amenable to the traditional definitions, such as the non-market sphere of organisational life lying between the family and the state. Invariably, South African politics and ideology overwhelm the typical institutional and functional considerations that are common within international civil society debates (Bond, 2004:2). The adopted definition of civil society in this discussion is again seen as fitting this realm.

3.3.1. *The post-apartheid era*

In order to appreciate civil society's standing post-apartheid the discussion takes the idea of Habib (2002) that celebrates civil society's plurality, as a point of departure. In this way, plurality then becomes a central aspect that should infuse our understandings, especially, of state-civil society relations in contemporary South Africa. We are reminded by the same author - and rightly so - that as a result, state-civil society relations will reflect this plurality. Some relationships between civil society actors and state institutions will be adversarial and conflictual, while others will be more collaborative and collegiate. This state of affairs should

not be bemoaned. Instead, it should be celebrated for it represents the political maturing of the South African society. Indeed, under apartheid, the adversarial-collaborative divide largely took a racial form with the bulk of “white civil society” establishing collegiate relations with the state, and the majority of “black civil society” adopting a conflictual mode of engagement. This racial divide began to blur in the transition period as significant sections of “white civil society” began to distance themselves from the apartheid regime. In the contemporary era, the racial divide has all but disappeared with adversarial and collegiate relations extending across the entire ambit of civil society (Habib, 2002:2).

3.3.2. *A resurgent civil society?*

Several writers (Bond, 2004; Buhlungu, 2004), refer to a resurgent or awakening of civil society in South Africa today. New protests movements are emerging around issues of service delivery⁹ or their non deliverance, especially at the local government level. These burgeoning social movements seem to be more organically driven and are grassroots in orientation. They also gravitate and converge around immediate issues of basic needs for poor communities.¹⁰ In fact the scenes of the new protests are a throw back to apartheid-era pro-democracy demonstration that South Africa has not witnessed in years. One problem area underlined by the demonstrations is the feeling that the democratic order has failed them (IRIN NEWS, 2005). These protests have also caught the attention of the president whose remarks in parliament highlight the gravity of the situation. He observed that the protests: “reflect and

⁹ Wiseman Magasela raises a very interesting point in regard to the usage of language or terminologies, in so far as they relate to the provision of social services in South Africa. He rightly notes that the term “service delivery” is one-sided and somehow places the state in a difficult position. Here, the state must “deliver” regardless the quality of the end product. Now several questions arise here: does “service delivery” entail quality or acceptability of standards? Would not the state be justified when it points out that it has “delivered” houses even though people are complaining that they are of low quality or are just “match-boxes”- as they are now popularly referred to by poor communities? Before this jargon became popular, commentators referred to service provision. Magasela warns that the attitudes of government personnel could be tuned into this mode of “delivery” just because of the language that is being used and then officials could get stuck on targets or quantity, as opposed to quality (Interview, 2006).

¹⁰ These upheavals probably began in early 1997 in El Dorado Park, a low-income, “coloured” township of Johannesburg. During a day-long protest, four people were killed over resident demands for lower municipal rates. In August 1997, several protests over service payments shook Johannesburg and Pretoria townships, the Mpumalanga town of Secunda, and even Butterworth in the distant ex-Transkei (where after three straight days of protest against municipal officials, a resident was shot dead before crowds dispersed). In KwaThema, east of Johannesburg, the houses of three ANC Councilors were burned down by angry residents. Thousands of residents of Tembisa Township, east of Johannesburg, demonstrated one winter afternoon in August 1997, leaving R 13 million (\$2 million) worth of electricity meters destroyed. Their anger was directed against the installation of a pre-payment system. [Quoted from: Bond, P. (2005). Globalisation/commodification or deglobalisation/decommodification in urban South Africa. *Policy Studies*, (26)3/4: 337-358. P.348]. These types of protests would continue into late 2005 and it seems like the culture has caught on.

seek to exploit the class and nationality fault lines we inherited from our past, which, if ever they took root, gaining genuine popular support, would pose a threat to the stability of democratic South Africa” (IRIN NEWS, 2005).

Zanele Twala, Executive Director of (SANGOCO) has reservations over some of the new social movements. She is of the opinion that indeed, civil society formations have to continue playing their role of “watchdogs”, by keeping the government accountable to its various commitments, either locally or globally for example, through international protocols of the United Nations Organisation. Also, by making sure that government honours its promises during elections or follows through its election manifesto. However, civil society organisations should not work in opposition to government, but must support structures that promote service delivery. She argues that civil society formations are not political parties and should not engage in political acrimonies, rather they should ensure that civil liberties and the rights of citizens are protected. These organisations must work in tandem with government. By taking this stance, it does not mean that they cannot be critical of government (Interview, 2006). Dr. Blade Nzimande, the Secretary General of the South African Communist Party (SACP), also made similar remarks on a recent trip to Zambia: “By civil society, it does not inherently mean opposition, but being critical when it is necessary” (The Post, 2006).

4. Points for consideration

There is no denying the fact that civil society’s role in poverty reduction remains pivotal in post-apartheid South Africa. The question to ask though is to what extent? Further, one would also want to find out just how effective CSO strategies have been in combating poverty. Then there is also the question of location in regard to interventions. At what levels should CSOs lead the assault on poverty? Should it be at the macro, mezzo or micro levels? In fact where does civil society’s competitive advantage lie when it comes to poverty reduction? Despite other issues that could impede civil society’s efficacy in poverty reduction, the role of policy is of major concern to this research, given its investigative slant. This shortfall seems to beleaguer civil society on the African continent as well. In a study spanning three countries: Ghana, Uganda and South Africa, it was noted that despite an acknowledgement of the importance of policy, findings pointed to the fact that few CSOs demonstrated a consistent level of direct involvement in the policy process, with fewer even making significant differences in policy outcomes (Robinson and Friedman, 2005). Even though in the South

African case, certain organisations such as COSATU and IDASA had considerable success in influencing public policy and legislation, many failed to have impact despite their links with the ANC government (Robinson and Friedman, 2005).

From the interviews and discussions undertaken by the researcher with actors in the sector, it seems that the bulk of interventions by civil society are at the micro level, thus leaving a lot of space for government to have the luxury of shaping policy according to its whims. It must be borne in mind that work in the policy realm is of critical importance, especially in this phase of South Africa's transition, where there is no credible opposition politics acting as a counter weight to the excesses of the ANC. Civil society needs to engage government on substantive policy discourses suggesting alternatives, for example, from the straight jacket of the GEAR doctrine. This stance will be of value to South Africa, given that pretensions towards social development or a developmental state, are still facing major shortfalls if the poverty backdrop just illuminated in this report, is soberly analysed. In this vein, alternative models have to be brought forth. For instance, given the government's somewhat obdurate stance on GEAR, the social investment model could be posited by civil society as an alternative in regard to poverty reduction. This model aims to move beyond redistributive, consumption-based social welfare, centred on benefits and rights, to one that, through investment in human capital, enhances people's capacity to participate (Perkins et. al, 2004).

It was also discovered that the country's overarching policy environment is not always in favour of civil society's energetic and self-driven poverty reduction inputs. The rise to prominence of the National Development Agency (NDA) may best illustrate this point. In 1998 government created the NDA via a statutory instrument, the *National Development Act*, for the purpose of channelling funds into civil society's poverty reduction initiatives. This arrangement meant that the funds that were disbursed directly to civil society from donors, in the past, would now be administered by the NDA. The whole rationale of this organisation rested on its mandate to fight poverty. However, the NDA did not live up to expectations as organisations in the sector faced difficulties in accessing the funds. Furthermore, the NDA was beset with internal problems relating to financial irregularities and accountability for sometime. Also, the Department for Social Development - whose aegis covers the NDA – and is supposed to be working in conjunction with the organisation, has been perceived by certain sections of civil society as not willing to work on an equal footing with such organs by going an extra mile in order to arrive at innovative partnerships. For example, despite calls for a

civil society forum that could help to fine-tune both the efforts of civil society and those of the government, the government through the former organisations has not been forthcoming. One civil society actor expressed these sentiments when questioned over the issue: “The National Department for Social Development would be funding organisations and leave it at that. But sitting down and planning or engaging with organisation has never been undertaken by the Department of Social Development. It just registers organisations so that they can access funding, but does not engage civil society. So there has not been proper collaboration in this regard. A civil society forum between government and civil society formations is important” (Twala, 2006).

The views expressed above are also reiterated in a study that was conducted by the Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE) in 2004, that found that even though members of civil society and state structures shared similar goals at an abstract level, they adopted very different approaches in practice, and as a result their relationship was characterised by mistrust and suspicion. Furthermore, the study also showed that many CSOs emphasised that their role was to supplement the efforts of the state, and not to substitute for them. The general agreement was that the state possessed resources and mechanisms that made its intervention in certain situations appropriate. The problem here revolves around partnerships – how they are defined and then operationalised. It seems that the ANC government does want to incorporate civil society in its quest to develop South Africa and reduce poverty. But it remains ambivalent on how this feat could be achieved. It must be noted that the question of partnerships is a policy issue and certain preconditions from both the government and civil society need to be fulfilled for these to be viable.

4.1. Suggestions for viable partnerships

In order to strengthen partnerships with civil society, the following issues could be taken into account:

- i. Building on civil society to mobilise the broad constituencies that can sustain political commitment.*

Civil society in most instances has a track record of credibility and creativity in mobilising broad constituencies. By building on the mobilisation efforts of CSOs, governments can gain credibility.

ii. Creating a supportive environment for partnerships with Civil Society Organisations.

Governments have to create the legal, financial and political environment that make partnerships with civil society possible and effective. Organisations in civil society require financial resources and support to build their capacities for providing effective inputs. Stronger CSOs, that have the freedom to act, the resources to utilise and can be held accountable are able to contribute more effectively to poverty reduction endeavours.

iii. Inviting CSO's participation in policy and programme design.

For partnerships between government and CSOs to develop and thrive, it is necessary to institute specific channels and mechanisms to facilitate constructive dialogue on programmes and policies. This means creating concrete opportunities for CSOs, particularly those that speak for constituencies of women and young people to participate with governments and development partners in setting priorities, suggesting budget allocations and service delivery models and assessing progress (Adapted from The World Health Report, 2005: 1-2).

CONCLUSION

This was an exploratory study whose main intention was to trigger debate and rekindle interest in the work of civil society in South Africa that primarily focuses on poverty reduction. It was felt by the researcher that most of the work in this arena had become sterile and needed innovation and rejuvenation. The stated position of this research was one of policy even though there are many levels at which poverty could be tackled. Nonetheless, the position was also influenced by an understanding that proactive policy that is backed by effective programmatic interventions would have far-reaching ramifications than for instance the setting up of soup kitchens for poor people. Furthermore, it was felt that government was having an unnecessary monopoly of the policy domain.

From the foregoing debates, it is suggested here that poverty reduction on the part of civil society cannot operate in a socio-political and economic void. Taking this position into account would mean that we treat the initiatives of civil society in this issue as interlinked to those of government. For this research, it is a matter of the existing policy environment and the manner in which the government operationalises such policies to dovetail its efforts and those of civil society, in poverty reduction. Finally, this research cannot be deemed as exhaustive but hopes to generate further research in this area in order to cement the assumptions and conclusions herein.

INTERVIEWEES

1. Professor Patrick Bond, Director of the Centre for Civil Society, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa
2. Mr. Wiseman Magasela (Ph.D candidate, University of Oxford, UK) also Researcher for the Centre for the analysis of South African social policy, University of Oxford.
3. Dr. Hein Marais, Writer, Editor, Journalist – Geneva, Switzerland.
4. Ms. Zanele Twala, Executive Director of South African National NGO Coalition (SANGOCO), Johannesburg, South Africa.

REFERENCES

- Abé, C., (2005). Reinventing development and the test of civil society in Africa. *CODESRIA Bulletin*, 3&4: 10.
- Aiyede, E.R., (2003). The dynamics of civil society and the democratisation process in Nigeria. *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 37(1): 1-27.
- African National Congress, (ANC), (1994). **The Reconstruction and Development Programme - RDP**. Johannesburg: Umanyano.
- Anheier, H.K., (2004). **Civil Society – Measurement, Evaluation and Policy**. London: Earthscan.
- Bayart, J-F., 1986. “Civil Society in Africa,” In P. Chabal (Ed.) **Political Domination in Africa**. (109-125). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bond, P. (2004). **Resurgent South African Civil Society. The Case of Johannesburg – and the Challenge of Globalisation (of people) and Deglobalisation (of capital)**. Presentation to the University of KwaZulu-Natal Centre for Civil Society, 9 June.
- Bond, P., (2005). Dragging SA’s Land Debate from the Neoliberal Quicksand. *Znet Daily Commentaries*. www.znet.org/sustainers/content/2005-08/29bond.cfm (Accessed, 7 January 2006).
- Bond, P., (2006). Global governance campaign and MDGs: from top-down to bottom-up anti-poverty work. *Third World Quarterly*, 27(2): 339-354.
- Buhlungu, S., (2006). **The Anti-pratisation forum: A profile of a post-apartheid social movement**. Durban: Centre for Civil Society/School of Development Studies.
- Community Agency for Social Enquiry (CASE), (2004). **Civil Society in South Africa: Opportunities and challenges in the transition process**. Johannesburg: CASE.
- Cob, C., (2002). PanAfrica: Nepad embraced but questioned at house hearing. www.fr.allafrica.com/stories/200209190001.html (Accessed, 21 March, 2006).
- Department of Lands Affairs, (1997). Land Policy White Paper. www.info/documents/whitepapers/index.htm (Accessed, 21 February, 2006).
- Department of Welfare, (1997). The White Paper for Social Welfare. **General Notice 1108 of 1997**. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Desai, A., (2005). **Uprooting or re-rooting poverty in post apartheid South Africa?** Prepared paper for SANPAD poverty reduction thematic workshop, 24-25 May.
- Diebert, R., (2000). International Plug ‘n Play? Citizen Activism, the Internet, and Global Public Policy. *International Studies Perspective*, 1 (2000): 255-272.

- Drezner, D.W., (2005). **Gauging The Power of Global Civil Society: Intellectual Property and Public Health**. Unpublished Paper. www.danieldrezner.com/research/gaugingcs.pdf (Accessed, 28 February 2006).
- Friedman, S., (1991). An unlikely utopia: state and civil society in South Africa. *Politikon*, 19: 5 – 19.
- Fatton, R., (1999). Civil society revisited: Africa in the new millennium. *West Africa Review*, 1(1): 1-18.
- Greenberg, S., (2004). **Post-apartheid Development, Landlessness and the Reproduction of Exclusion in South Africa**. Report No.17. Durban: Centre for Civil Society.
- Government of the Republic of South Africa (1996). **The Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy (GEAR) - A Macroeconomic Strategy**. www.polity.org.za/html/govdocs/policy/growth.html (Accessed, 7 January 2006).
- Gyimah-Boadi, E., (1996). Civil society in Africa. *Journal of Democracy*, (7)2: 118-132.
- Hall, A., and Midgley, J., (2004). **Social Policy for Development**. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Hall, J.A., and Trentmann, F. (2005). “Contest over Civil Society: Introductory Perspectives”, In J.A. Hall and F. Trentmann (Eds.), **Civil Society – A Reader in History, Theory and Global Politics**. (pp.1-25). New York, NY.: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN.
- Habib, A., (2000). **State-civil society relations in post-apartheid South Africa**. www.sangonet.org.za/snsite/images/stories/AdamHabibPresentation.doc (retrieved 4 March, 2006).
- Harberson, J.W., (1994). “Civil Society and Political Renaissance in Africa”, In J.W. Harberson, D. Rothchild, and N. Chazan, (Eds.), **Civil Society and the State in Africa**. (pp.1-33). London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Hargreaves, S., (2001). **Poverty, Gender and Landlessness in South Africa**. *Intersections*, Issue No. 2.
- Hearn J., (1994). **Foreign aid and democratisation and civil society in Africa: A study of South Africa, Ghana and Uganda. Discussion Paper 368**. Sussex: Institute of Development Studies.
- Howell, J., and Pearce, J., (2002). **Civil Society and Development: A Critical Exploration**. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
- IRIN NEWS, (2005). **South Africa: Rising pressure on government to deliver quicker**. www.irinnews.org/S_report (Accessed, 17 March 2006).

- Khilnani, S., (2001). "The development of civil society", In S. Kaviraj and S. Khilnani (Eds.). **Civil Society – History and Possibilities**. (pp.11-32). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kean, J., (2003). **Global Civil Society?** Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kotze, H. (2003). Responding to the growing socio-economic crisis? A review of civil society in South Africa. *Development Update*, 4(4): 1-32.
- Landman, J.P., Bhorat, P., and van der Berg, S., (2003). **Poverty and inequality in South Africa 2004-2014. Current trends, issues and future policy options**. Pretoria: University of South Africa (UNISA).
- London School of Economics, Centre for Civil Society (2004). **What is civil society?** www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm (Accessed, 28 February 2006).
- Magasela, W., (2005). **Constructing and adopting an official poverty line for South Africa: Issues for consideration**. A discussion document for the National Labour and Economic Development Institute (NALEDI).
- Mail and Guardian, (2003). **Don't be small about BIG**. 13 June 2003.
- Makgetla, N., (2005). **End job losses! Fight poverty and unemployment**. Unpublished paper. www.naledi.org.za/docs/cosatu_jobstrike.pdf (Accessed, 22 February, 2006).
- Manuel, T. (2004). *Data for poverty measurement. Opening address at the Joint National Treasury/World Bank workshop*, www.sarpn.org.za (Accessed, 1 July 2004).
- Marais, H., (1997). **The Voluntary Sector and Development in South Africa 1996/1997**. Johannesburg: INTERFUND.
- Marais, H., (1998). **South Africa: Limits to change - the political economy of transformation**. Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Marias, H., (2006). **Interview**.
- Mngxitama, A., (2006). **The National Land Committee 1994-2004. A Critical Insider's Perspective**. Report 34 (Volume 2): 1-48. Durban: Centre for Civil Society.
- Nkwanchuku, O., (2003). **Conventional notion of civil society, international civil society organisations and the development of civil society in Africa**. Paper presented at the International Civil Society Forum, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 8th – 9th September.
- Noble, M., Ratcliffe, A., and Wright, G., (2004). **Conceptualising, Defining and Measuring Poverty in South Africa – An argument for a Consensual Approach**. Centre for the Analysis of South African Social Policy. Unpublished Paper.
- Noyoo, N., (2000). From resistance to development: civil society and democracy in post-apartheid South Africa. **Scottish Community Development Journal**, 6(2000): 35-42.

- Noyoo, N., (2003). For or against us? A review of political developments in South Africa. **Annual Review - INTERFUND**, 3(4): 89-109.
- Noyoo, N., (2005). **Social Development and Indigenous Systems**. Paper presented at the Conference on Social Work of the South and Indigenous Systems, Erfurt University, Erfurt, Germany, 26 – 29 September.
- Perkins, D., Nelms, L., and Smyth, P., (2004). **Beyond neo-liberalism: the social investment state? Social policy working paper No.3**. Fitzroy, Vic.: The Centre for Public Policy.
- Robinson, M., and Friedman, S., (2005). **Civil society, democratisation and foreign aid in Africa. IDS Discussion Paper, 383**. Sussex: Institute of Development Studies.
- Simpson, G., (1998). NGOs and Democracy: Building for the new millennium. Message from the Director. **Annual Report**. Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR).
- Sooka, Y., (2005). *Civil society can be a powerful force for change*. **Mail and Guardian**, 20 June.
- South African National NGO Coalition (SANGOCO), (2006). **SANGOCO Campaigns**. www.sangoco.za (Accessed, 20 February, 2006).
- Statistics South Africa, (2004). **Labour Force Survey (LFS)**. www.statssa.gov.za (Accessed, 20 October, 2005).
- The Post, (2006). The Church played a vital role in SA. Thursday, 30 March.
- Thwala, W.D., (2003). **Background – Land and Agrarian Reform in South Africa**. www.landaction.org/display.php?article=60 (Accessed, 10 March, 2005).
- Twala, S., (2006). **Interview**.
- UNDP (2003). **South Africa Human Development Report**. Cape Town: Oxford University Press.
- Wikipedia, (2006). **The Free Encyclopedia**. www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/NEPAD (Accessed, 10 March, 2006).
- World Bank, (2006). **Measuring poverty**. www.worldbank.org (Accessed, 13 January, 2006).
- World Health Organisation, (WHO), (2005). **The World Health Report**. Geneva: WHO.

