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The Range of CSOs and How They Can Be Useful to Anti-corruption Agencies in Africa

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Introduction

Civil society organisations (CSOs) can be defined as:

The sphere of institutions, organisations, and individuals located between the family, the state, and the market, in which people associate voluntarily to advance common interests.

One of the common interests, particularly of poor and marginalised people, is avoiding the damaging effects of corruption. In this, they have a natural affinity with anti-corruption agencies (ACAs) that share the same interest.



CSOs, Civil Society, and the Public

- ▶ By “civil society”, we usually mean the public or the citizenry that is engaged in some issue important to them.
- ▶ When we use “CSOs”, we move from engagement on issues to commitment to development outcomes - one of which is likely to be preventing corruption.
- ▶ Most countries have one kind or another of “NGO Law” that is often managed by an NGO Council. These usually register formal and foreign-funded organisations.



CSOs, Civil Society, and the Public

- ▶ There are other legal instruments for CSOs, such as trusts, foundations, non-profit companies, clubs, trade unions, and cooperatives.
- ▶ However, many CSOs, including social movements and recreational organisations, are not registered and have no need to be.



Types of CSOs

- ▶ **CSOs** = Civil society organisations - the most generic way to describe social and development organisations that are not governmental, not for personal profit, and independent. They can be local, national, or international and funded from a variety of sources.
- ▶ **NGOs** = Non-governmental organisations - usually refer to large formal and often overseas-funded development organisations



Types of CSOs

- ▶ **CBOs** = Community-based organisations - small, local organisations, often voluntary with no paid staff
- ▶ **FBOs** = Faith-based organisations - development organisations based on membership of a faith group
- ▶ **Non-state actors** = an EU term that encompasses CSOs, but particularly includes business associations and trade unions

Focus of CSOs

- ▶ There are relatively few CSOs that have a specific corruption mandate.
- ▶ Most CSOs concern themselves with service delivery and humanitarian work, particularly as it concerns the poorest.



Focus of CSOs

- ▶ When they see that the plight of the poorest and most marginalised is worsened by poor delivery of public services, often due to corruption, they become more involved in governance and accountability, particularly on preventing and exposing corruption.
- ▶ This is where CSOs share common ground with ACAs and can be useful to them.



What Do Different CSOs Offer ACAs?

My suggestion is that ACAs can best connect to the public through civil society and CSOs. There are two basic kinds of CSOs that can be useful to ACAs:

- ▶ Mutual benefit organisations
- ▶ Public benefit organisations

These are legitimate CSOs that have the interests of their constituents at heart.

However, it is important to guard against fake CSOs, which we call:

- ▶ Pretenders (or private benefit organizations)



Mutual Benefit Organisations

- ▶ These are membership organisations formed by people who share the same problems and whose members are the ones who manage the organisations.
- ▶ They may be small village level associations.



Mutual Benefit Organisations

- ▶ They may be large national organisations (e.g. of persons with disabilities, women, or youth).
- ▶ They may be ethnic organisations, peoples' movements, or religious organisations, which may be of considerable importance.
- ▶ Community-based organisations (and the CSOs or NGOs that help them) often have knowledge and experience of corruption, because it affects their members personally.

Public Benefit Organisations

- ▶ These are organisations of people who wish to help other people who they think are being harmed, marginalized, or otherwise discriminated against. This definitely includes those who are victims of corruption.
- ▶ However, they are not membership organisations, but play a more activist role.
- ▶ They seek financing from third parties, often foreign, acting as intermediaries with local organisations.



Public Benefit Organisations

- ▶ They are often vocal on behalf of “their” causes and are competent with the media.
- ▶ Some public benefit organisations are actively engaged in the fight against corruption. They may proactively seek out corruption, denounce it, and push for the punishment of those responsible, often at the national level.



The Pretenders (Private Benefit Organisations)

There are also the pretenders, those that are not legitimate CSOs, but exist to benefit themselves or their backers. They come in a variety of forms:

- ▶ Simple crooks - privately owned companies, which take advantage of CSO legislation or collaborate with corrupt government officials to make money;
- ▶ GONGOs (government-owned NGOs) – these are trickier, they claim to be independent, but are actually government-owned;
- ▶ MANGOs (mass organisations) pretending to be membership organisations, but are actually controlled by government;



The Pretenders (Private Benefit Organisations)

- ▶ BONGOs (business-owned NGOs) - NGOs that seek business opportunities while masquerading as corporate social responsibility entities;
- ▶ DONGOs (donor-owned NGOs) - donors set up “shell NGOs” to undertake their own programmes without the complexity of dealing with indigenous NGOs; and
- ▶ PONGOs (politicians’ NGOs) - again, shell NGOs that are “owned” by a politician to advance their name or keep their name alive when they are out of office.



ACA Collaboration with CSOs

- ▶ While pretender organisations of any sort should obviously be avoided, in my opinion there are huge advantages to ACAs collaborating with MBOs and PBOs to help them combat corruption
- ▶ These CSOs can act as intermediaries between ACAs and the public, particularly outside of capital cities.



ACA Collaboration with CSOs

- ▶ They can channel citizens' concerns to ACAs and provide information about corruption and abuse of power.
- ▶ They can also let communities know about the work of ACAs, which may not be well known to everyone.
- ▶ CSOs concerned about corruption and ACAs share a common goal - to prevent and counter corruption in order to create better development outcomes for citizens.
- ▶ The benefits of collaboration can be greater than each operating independently.



Fertile Ground for Collaboration

- ▶ I hope that ACAs see common (and fertile) ground to be cultivated with different kinds of CSOs. Many different people can identify and expose corruption to ACAs and some of the most useful are likely to be CSOs.
- ▶ I look forward greatly to our discussion. My concluding message is that CSOs can be allies to ACAs in their fight against corruption and can help ACAs build support for their work with the public at large. It is a potentially mutually beneficial and win-win relationship.





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