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Synthesis report on the impact of
foreign political aid to civil society
organisations in South Africa

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ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This report forms part of phase three of a research project entitled 'The impact of foreign political aid on civil society organisations in South Africa', conducted by the Centre for Policy Studies. This, in turn, forms part of a broader study on the impact of foreign political aid on civil society in Africa, co-ordinated by the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) of Sussex University in the United Kingdom. Other country studies are being conducted in Ghana and Uganda by institutional partners based in those countries; they are the Centre for Basic Research in Kampala, Uganda, and the Department of Political Science of the University of Ghana. This phase of the South African country study has been funded by the Royal Danish Embassy and a private donor. Other components of the study have been funded by the British Department for International Development (DFID).

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Introduction

Are South Africans using their new democratic rights to hold their government to account and to ensure that it responds to them? Are foreign aid donors, who repeatedly stress their support for South Africa's new democracy, using their resources to help citizens to do that and so ensure that the democratic system works for them?

While much has been written about democracy, it is easy to forget that it is meant to ensure that rulers govern on behalf of, and are therefore responsible to, citizens. The primary means of ensuring this is regular elections, which enable citizens to remove from office representatives who do not respond to or effectively serve them. But, if this were the only method, it would offer those to whom governments are responsible only a weak means of ensuring responsiveness. It is therefore a core element of democracy that citizens enjoy, between elections, the right and capacity to pronounce on government actions and policies and seek to influence them. And, while citizens enjoy this right as individuals, they are unlikely to be able to exert much influence unless they combine with others who share their interests or values. The associations in which citizens do this, organisations of civil society, are therefore crucial instruments of government accountability and responsiveness in a democracy. And it could be argued that, if donors who devote funds to supporting democracy are either enhancing the capacity of citizens to hold the government to account, or the government's ability to respond to them, or both, they will offer assistance that might strengthen the democratic system.

It has also been argued¹ that participation in democratically organised civil society organisations (CSOs) can instil in citizens the habits of acting with others to secure common goals, holding leaders to account and tolerating different points of view, all of which are said to be essential to the exercise of democratic citizenship. In this view, then, the character of CSOs – more particularly, the degree to which they are internally democratic – can determine the extent to which their activities contribute to building democratic practices and attitudes among citizens. This implies that donor funding may be able to contribute to democratisation if it is used to support democratically organised CSOs.

These considerations suggest that gauging the state of post-apartheid civil society is crucial to an assessment of the health of South African democracy. They imply too that an evaluation of the extent to which foreign donors are indeed assisting democracy's development in South Africa must examine the extent to which they are helping or hindering citizens' capacity, through their organisations, to influence government actions and policies.

This paper presents the most significant findings of the third phase of the South African contribution to a study that has sought to research the impact of foreign political aid on CSOs and on democratisation in three African countries: South Africa, Ghana, and Uganda. It was conducted in partnership with the Institute for Development Studies of Sussex University in the United Kingdom; the Centre for Basic Research in Kampala,

¹ See for example Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1994

Uganda; and the department of political science of the University of Ghana. This third phase consisted of detailed studies of a range of CSOs, more specifically their organisational capacity, their internal democratic processes and structures, and their political efficacy, understood as their ability to influence government policy and legislation for the benefit of their members and other social actors.

In each case, the study also attempted to assess the effect on the CSO of donor funding where it has been available, and where it has not, to analyse the effect thereof and the likely implications of it receiving donor funding. In order to derive conclusions about the effects of donor actions, the analysis was conducted at two levels. The first concerned the 'outputs' of donor interventions: are donors supporting, in appropriate ways, the types of CSOs and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that are likely to contribute to democratic consolidation? The second relates to outcomes; what evidence is there that CSOs and NGOs supported by donors are making an active contribution through activities designed to influence government policy and law?

As suggested earlier, CSOs can contribute to building democracy by fostering political pluralism, engendering democratic values, and enhancing participation in public life, though some are geared towards the narrow self-interest of their members.² The framework developed by Hadenius and Ugglå³ provides criteria through which this contribution might be evaluated. Civil society's contribution to pluralism depends on **multiplicity, autonomy, and organisational diversity**. First, a well-developed civil society, characterised by many popular organisations, exercises a balancing role by providing a bulwark against despotic tendencies in public life and a defence against oppression. Second, a high degree of autonomy is required for CSOs to be effective in influencing the actions of state actors. Third, organisational diversity allows a wide range of groups and interests to form networks and associations. On civil society's **political educational function**, the key criteria for evaluation are **participation and accountability**. CSOs provide structures for inculcating democratic norms and promoting consensus-building if they have a broad and voluntary membership and a leadership that is accountable and responsive.

A **capacity to foster political participation** is the fourth main attribute of some CSOs. Where CSOs rely for their influence on a mobilised membership who can apply sanctions against the state if their demands are not addressed, their structures may be an important determinant of ability to influence state decisions and behaviour and establish productive relations with other organisations. A participatory approach to decision-making and an open and accountable leadership may enhance an ability to exercise control over state actors and influence over policies and resources. An example is a trade union, which can organise industrial action. One of the CSOs researched during this study, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), derives its influence from this

² L Diamond 'Towards Democratic Consolidation', *Journal of Democracy*, 5 (3), 1994, pp.4-14; G White 'Civil Society, Democratization and Development (I): Clearing the Analytical Ground', *Democratization*, 1 (3), 1994, pp.375-90.

³ A Hadenius and F Ugglå 'Making Civil Society Work, Promoting Democratic Development: What Can States and Donors Do?', *World Development*, 24 (10), 1996, pp.1621-39.

capacity and its formal alliance with the governing party, which is considerably dependent on it to deliver the votes of workers and their families. Since its influence rests on its capacity to induce members to act, by withholding labour or voting, the degree to which leaders enjoy the support of members is a crucial determinant of effectiveness.

A further contribution to participation is the combination of smaller groups into larger organisations and the creation of horizontal links and strategic alliances among similar types of CSO, which can be politically effective in channelling claims and promoting democracy.⁴ At its inception, another of the CSOs which we studied, the Women's National Coalition (WNC), was able to achieve this. In principle, however, citizen participation may also be enhanced by NGOs which do not recruit members but seek to influence public debate. They may increase participation by successfully pressing for policies and practices that open new opportunities to citizens seeking to take part in public decision-making or by imparting capacities to membership organisations, better enabling the citizens who belong to them to participate in democratic public life. One such example is the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), which also formed part of this study.

Mindful of these considerations, the research examined six CSOs, including an NGO that does not rely on a membership base. They were selected because each was seen as an exemplar of a section of South Africa civil society, and are:⁵

- the South African National Civics Organisation (SANCO), a national, membership-based organisation seeking to speak for township residents;
- the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), a national, membership-based, trade union federation;
- the Federation of African Business and Consumer Societies (FABCOS), a national, membership-based organisation, representing black small business and consumers;
- the Women's National Coalition (WNC), a national coalition of women's organisations, including membership-based affiliates and activist or professional NGOs;
- the Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), a professional advocacy NGO which does not recruit members but receives significant donor funding;
- two farmers' organisations in North West province, chosen as counterfactual examples of local rural organisations that are membership-based but do not receive donor funding.

The framework that informed the research was based largely on our understanding of the shifts in the post-1994 political opportunity structure⁶ and its impact on South African

⁴ Hadenius and Ugglå *ibid.*

⁵ Each organisational study is individually published. They were researched and authored by: SANCO - Patrick Heller and Libhongo Ntlokankulu; COSATU - Shaun Mackay and Malachia Mathoho; IDASouth Africa - Claude Kabemba and Steven Friedman; Womens' National Coalition - Darryl Gershater; FABCOS - Dumisani Hlope, Malachia Mathoho, Steven Friedman and Maxine Reitzes; North-West Farmers' Organisations - Tobias Schmitz and Libhongo Ntlokankulu.

⁶ The concept 'political opportunity structure' is borrowed from Sidney Tarrow, who explains it as 'consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent or national – dimensions of the political environment which either encourage or discourage people from using collective action'. The most salient changes in opportunity structure result from the opening of access to power, shifts in ruling alignments, the availability of influen-

civil society and donor funding strategies. On the one hand, the role of CSOs and NGOs under apartheid, and the contribution of donor funding to it, influenced changes in the political environment. In turn, these closed off some possibilities for CSOs and NGOs, and opened new ones. For the purposes of our analysis, the most significant post-1994 changes in South Africa's political opportunity structure include an inclusive constitutional framework and legal citizenship; a constitution and bill of rights providing for the formal protection of universal rights, including freedom of association; a multiparty, representative democracy; and a legitimate government and state.

In much western democratic theory on the relationship between civil society and the state, the two are not adversarial but complementary. According to Arato and Cohen,

The political role of civil society is not directly related to the control or conquest of power but to the generation of influence through the life of democratic associations and unconstrained discussions in the cultural public sphere.⁷

Similarly, Naomi Chazan views this relationship as constituted of 'organisations that are autonomous from the state but interrelate with it', or 'associations that interact with the state but don't want to take it over'.⁸

But some South African CSOs and NGOs were part of a peculiar type of civil society which existed before 1994. Most South Africans were excluded from the state and representative institutions, since they were denied full citizenship rights, including the franchise and the basic right to associate and influence government decisions. As a result, the rationale of many CSOs was not just to make claims against the state, but to posit themselves as alternative sites of authority, and to take over and hence democratise the illegitimate, undemocratic, and unrepresentative apartheid state. And, since the apartheid government had banned the liberation movements, particularly the African National Congress (ANC), and jailed or exiled its leaders, a key element in the campaign against it was the insistence that particular movements or leadership figures were the sole and authentic representatives of the entire black majority. This produced pressures in civil society for an artificial unity that disguised, constrained, and repressed pluralism and diversity. Many CSOs presented themselves as the sole representatives of large groups of people who shared a common race and geographic location but not necessarily the same values or functional interests: the unifying project of overthrowing the apartheid state was frequently cited as a far greater priority than the expression of diversity. This legacy produced a politics of 'us' and 'them', a low level of tolerance in crucial parts of anti-apartheid civil society, and a highly mobilised citizenry.

In 1992, before the formal transition to democracy, Shubane argued that the peculiar characteristics of the pre-1994 South Africa polity resulted in the organisations that

tial allies and cleavages in and among elites. State structures create stable opportunities, but it is changing opportunities within states that provide the openings that 'actors can use to create new movements'. S Tarrow *Power in Movement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p.18

⁷ JL Cohen and A Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992, p.ix-x.

⁸ N Chazan 'Discussion - Governability and Compliance during the Transition in R de Villers (ed) *Governability during the Transition* Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 1993, p.14

fought it being wrongly identified as CSOs rather than ‘... part of the opposition, seeking to transform the current apartheid state’⁹. He predicted that ‘... many of these groups may become the new functionaries of that future transformed state, thus forming part of the state rather than of civil society’. Significantly, he warned that ‘there are *characteristics inherent to liberation movements which militate against the emergence of civil society*’.¹⁰ This analysis points to a need to take into account the origins of South African CSOs and the degree to which their loyalty to the ANC as liberation movement during the struggle against apartheid has constrained their ability to play an effective role as a vehicle for citizen interests now that the ANC is the governing party.

A key finding of this study is thus that, in many cases, the democratisation of the South African polity has reduced the capacity for action and the political efficacy of CSOs that fought apartheid – because most have failed to reorganise and change strategy to position themselves in ways that would allow them to exploit the new political opportunities which have emerged post-1994.

Shubane’s arguments offer a key to a partial explanation. Most of the organisations studied by this project fought to usher in a new democracy dominated by agents with which they are inextricably linked. COSATU and SANCO are official or unofficial allies of the ANC; FABCOS identified itself with the struggle against apartheid, seeing itself as a vehicle for the fight against its economic manifestations; IDASA was established to facilitate negotiation between whites and the ANC; and the WNC was largely motivated by the ANC Women’s League (ANCWL). Having succeeded in the unifying project of dismantling the formal institutions of apartheid, these organisations have had mixed fortunes in identifying new roles and strategies, and reorganising themselves in appropriate ways. The successes are IDASA, which continually reinvents itself in response to changes in the political opportunity structure and donor priorities; and COSATU, which remains representative of worker interests and has increasingly shown a willingness to hold the government to account. SANCO at a national level speaks largely with its master’s voice, and is largely paralysed as a result of its subservience to the ANC, but local civics have become far more pluralised and fragmented, and are more reflective of a multiplicity of interests.

Even in these cases, there is some support for Shubane’s argument that ‘there are *characteristics inherent to liberation movements which militate against the emergence of civil society*’. Thus COSATU has, in the view of some critics, allowed its relationship with the ANC to place limits on its willingness to advance its members’ interests. As noted above, however vigorous and representative local civics may be, SANCO nationally has placed loyalty to the movement above the need to articulate grass-roots concerns. Both have leaders who are elected to parliament and other formal governance structures as ANC representatives – in the case of COSATU, this relationship is institutionalised through a quota system. And whereas it would be spurious to suggest that IDASA is a functionary of the new government, it has had to redefine its advocacy role, limiting it to ensure a partnership with the government. And FABCOS and the WNC have, to varying degrees, lost their impetus as CSOs in post-apartheid South Africa.

⁹ K Shubane ‘Civil Society in Apartheid and Post-Apartheid South Africa’ in *Theoria* (1992), 70; 33-41, p.35.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p.37.

A contrary dynamic faces the farmers' organisations which both, in different ways, benefited from apartheid. Operating in the former homeland of Bophuthatswana, they were advantaged by the logic of the system, which aimed to assist the development of homeland areas; one had the added advantage of being linked to traditional authority systems and structures of patronage, which were used by the government as conduits of apartheid policies. The post-1994 government has jettisoned these relationships, and these organisations also face the challenge of adapting to the new political opportunity structure, albeit in very different ways to the others. While, for the other CSOs, the chief challenges are posed by the danger that closeness to the new order may constrain opportunities for action, for these associations it is how to respond to an environment in which government may be as distant – and in one cases clearly more so – than ever.

We are not arguing that CSOs can play a democratising role only if they are distant from the governing party. Since democratic governments are elected by the majority of citizens, we would expect many if not most CSOs to represent many who voted for the governing party. Civil society is also built on the freedom to organise and associate, which is enjoyed by the governing party's supporters too. A significant proportion of CSOs should therefore be linked to or supportive of that party. This applies even more so in a society such as South Africa in which political loyalties seem stable and almost two thirds of citizens have voted for the ruling party: if most CSOs were not sympathetic to the ANC, we would have to assume that most citizens lacked access to civil society. But a key feature of civil society is that CSOs are formed to represent interests and values that are not expressed directly through the political system – ANC members are also workers, black business people, township residents, or women. The key test proposed here is the degree to which links with the ruling party have constrained CSOs' ability to adequately represent their members in their roles as bearers of interests, values and identities other than those directly expressed by party-political allegiance. This may entail using links with the governing party to win gains for members or mobilising against it on specific issues while remaining broadly sympathetic to it. And our finding is that, while they have been better able to do so than Shubane's analysis predicted, they are nevertheless limited by a failure, to varying degrees, to redesign their role in ways that enhance their ability to represent their constituency while retaining their political loyalties.

Another finding suggests that members of some of the CSOs have indeed taken advantage of the new political opportunity structure: they are now enfranchised citizens, with political parties to represent their interests previously championed by CSOs. This does not necessarily mean that they will join parties in preference to CSOs – the belief that citizens can influence events by voting, which is strongly held by many South Africans,¹¹ may reduce their propensity to participate in any organisation, since citizens may feel no need for another vehicle for expression. It also may not reduce participation in CSOs, since citizens may retain instrumental reasons for belonging (the desire to gain access to government contracts, access to land, wage increases). But it could affect levels of participation in CSOs and their political efficacy. Thus COSATU membership has arguably become less

¹¹ Robert Mattes, Yul Derek Davids and Cherrel Africa *Views of Democracy in South Africa and the Region: Trends and Comparisons*, Cape Town, Institute for Democracy in South Africa, 2000

politicised, and less open to participation. Similarly, FABCOS seems to have lost impetus as members now largely rely on the post-apartheid government to address their desire for economic opportunity.

A third key question is whether CSOs that fought apartheid and are broadly sympathetic to the governing party have made sufficient gains from their relationship with the governing party to largely remove the need for an oppositional role: after all, those who continually bemoan declining citizen mobilisation since apartheid's end appear to have ignored the possibility that there may be far less against which to mobilise. Certainly, it would be hard to sustain the argument that these CSOs have gained nothing from the post-1994 government: COSATU benefits from labour relations law significantly more favourable to it, WNC from a substantially gender-friendly constitution and set of laws, FABCOS from laws and policies that offer preference to black business, and SANCO's constituency from housing subsidies, new electricity and water connections. But each has strong reasons for opposing government policies and actions that are, in its view, inimical to the interests of its members. Thus COSATU has unsuccessfully opposed government macro-economic policies, and women's organisations the limited resources devoted to enforcing gender-friendly statutes and pronouncements; the black business organisations which FABCOS represents have called without success for stronger government action in their favour; and SANCO constituents must contend with municipal privatisation strategies, punitive actions against those who do not pay for service, and unresponsive or corrupt local officials.

The implication of these findings is that the new political opportunity structure has not enabled these CSOs to achieve via their political loyalties that which they could once strive for only through mass mobilisation. The need for independent action to secure the interests of their members remains, and, to the extent that CSOs are not realigning themselves with the need to act within democratic rules rather than simply relying on contacts with government, they are failing to respond to the new political opportunity structure in ways that give their members an effective voice. And this could be attributable to a tendency to place more store on dealings with government leaders than on responding to their membership. Examples may include the hopes pinned by COSATU on joint decision-making instruments within the ANC alliance, or by FABCOS on its regular contact with government officials. Similarly, there may be cases in which CSOs' loyalty to the government prevents them from challenging actions that disadvantage their members, such as alleged corruption by government officials or politicians. On the other hand, the new opportunity structure would require these CSOs to retain sufficient links to the government to ensure that their demands have a reasonable prospect of being enacted into law or policy.

Since civil society is highly plural and diversified, these findings do not apply to all CSOs. Changes in the political opportunity structure had differential effects on CSOs: those who have been close to the apartheid government would have to find sources of influence other than contacts based on an identity shared with government representatives – indeed, the perception by the post-1994 government that they had helped to implement apartheid might limit their influence, requiring new tactics and strategies. But,

because South Africa's racial history means that the CSOs with most capacity to offer an influential voice to citizens will be those broadly sympathetic to majority aspirations, and the ANC continues to dominate majority politics, the future of South Africa civil society is likely to be largely determined by CSOs which lean to the governing party. And, while different sections of civil society have been affected differently by changes in the political opportunity structure, there are questions that enable us to assess the effectiveness and contribution to democracy of all CSOs, regardless of their location on the political or social spectrum.

Against this background, the impact of the post-1994 political opportunity structure on CSOs can be disaggregated, in accordance with our objectives, into these themes:

- their relation to government, specifically their ability to remain autonomous, yet effectively impact on policy and legislation in ways that represent the interests of their members, and broaden and deepen democracy;
- the extent to which they are able to engage with the government, while maintaining or enhancing their internal democratic structures and processes via the participation of their members in decisions and the accountability of their leaders to members;
- the extent to which they represent interests and identities – for example, class and gender - which they are able, when required, to prioritise above that of their political identity; and
- the impact of donor funding on these relationships, processes and structures, donors' rationales for their funding strategies, and whether or not these strategies are effective.

Not all the studies fit neatly into this framework. IDASA's internal democratic processes and structures cannot be assessed as it is not membership-based. The farmers' organisations cannot be analysed to determine the impact of donor funding. But the findings of the organisational studies suggest that the most significant factors that inform all the themes under discussion are:

The organisations' relations with the government;

the degree to which these enable them to exert influence while respecting internal democracy;

the nature and site of the impulse for their genesis and associational logic:

whether they are organically based (as in the case of COSATU and the civics movement), or have been manufactured and imposed from the 'top', whether by the ANC (SANCO) or political parties (WNC), the apartheid government (one of the farmers' organisations), a black economic elite (FABCOS), or traditional authority (another of the farmers' organisations).

Relevant here is also whether they are issue-, identity- or interest-based (although these are not mutually exclusive).

Relations with the government

COSATU is a member of the ANC/SACP/COSATU alliance; SANCO has strong historical links with the ANC; and COSATU, SANCO, the WNC and FABCOS are members of NEDLAC. But privileged access to the ruling party and government has highly differential effects on

their ability to maintain their autonomy, and influence government policy in pursuit of their members' interests.

Such partnerships can enhance the position of political insiders at the expense of grassroots citizens or those with differing political loyalties. They also have the potential to erode pressure for government accountability, and provide disincentives for independent criticism. The government may view CSO partners as mere conduits of state policy, and individuals may view them as vehicles for political advancement or economic opportunity. They also provide fertile ground for corruption and maladministration.

But co-operation and partnership with government does not necessarily imply negative consequences for CSO autonomy. In some cases full incorporation of CSOs in corporatist or alliance structures, or partnerships with government, have not compromised their independence.¹² The organisational studies find that this is the case with COSATU and IDASA, but not SANCO or FABCOS.

SANCO was formed in 1992 to provide a national unitary structure, representative of local civics. Its ability to engage with government and impact on policy, while maintaining autonomy and democratic structures and processes, is markedly different between national, regional and branch levels. One apparent explanation is that it vacillates between being an organisation and a movement and that this directly informs its relationship with the state. Ultimately, according to Heller and Ntlokonkulu, 'it is much more a movement, and specifically a set of loosely coordinated community based associations, than an organisation'.¹³ It is more a movement of civics, than a civics movement.

At national level, SANCO was historically part of the ANC alliance in practice although never formally an alliance member. It has continued to invest in a politics of incorporation and its higher structures serve largely as conduits of alliance control. Some critics argue that this has stifled the political – if not operational – autonomy of civics at lower levels. An Eastern Cape SANCO official professed: 'Civic problems can only be addressed if the civic organisation is affiliated to the party. There is no point in just making noise. We have to inject ideas into the political party. The watchdog role of the civic is to be inside the political party ... the civic formation should account to the political party'.¹⁴ A paradoxical illustration of the politics of participation being subordinated to incorporation, is that the most important source of conflict between SANCO and the ANC is the struggle for control over local government candidate nominations.

Its leadership also seems to require the blessing of the ANC from regional level upwards, and many SANCO leaders have been absorbed into ANC and government structures. (In the 1999 national elections, 6 National Working committee members became ANC MPs). The double-edged effect has been to create a leadership vacuum and to erode its independence at higher levels because some of its leaders wear two representational hats. Many critics argue that this has the effect, at branch level, of local opportunists using SANCO to build power bases from which to launch themselves into political or govern-

¹² See for example Alan Cawson *Corporatism and Political Theory* London, Basil Blackwell, 1985

¹³ Patrick Heller and Libhongo Ntlokonkulu.

¹⁴ Ibid.

ment careers. These dynamics obviously compromise the autonomy of the organisation, and its ability to impact on the ANC government's policy.

After 1994, SANCO's national structure failed to provide the civic movement with independent strategic direction, mostly as a result of its subservience to the ANC, and has had little or no impact on government policy, even though it is circumspect in its criticism of the government, and reaffirms its support for the ANC. As suggested above, a relationship with the ANC is not capable, on its own, of ensuring influence. And because popular support remains rooted at the local level, SANCO cannot mobilise members at the national level, where most policy-making occurs. To the extent that national structures do play a significant political role, they press for more overt support to the ANC. At the 1997 national conference, a block of NEC members reversed policy which prohibited dual positions in SANCO and government, further blurring the line between it and the ANC.

A very different picture emerges at branch level. Because of the perceived insulation of local government from communities, and the difficulties township residents have in interfacing with it, SANCO-affiliated civics address bread and butter issues and perform brokerage functions between rate defaulters and the local council, or residents and the electricity provider, ESKOM. But civics tend to remain largely disengaged from, and often substitutes for, state agencies. Thus there has been a relative shift in their function from contestation to service provision in response to market or state failures, for example, assisting in apprehending criminals and providing community patrols. Another function is conflict mediation. Notwithstanding this, the main cause of tension between civics and local ANC branches is the extent to which civics challenge ANC councillors and hold local councillors accountable: in some instances, SANCO officials have exposed corruption and fraud.

In their relationship with SANCO national structures, civics enjoy autonomy and their activities are largely self-governed, responsive to the particular needs and interests of local constituencies. They also often take positions and organise protests which are contrary to provincial and national stances.

In many townships there is an increasing rift between the ANC and civics, and residents are more likely to attend civic than ANC meetings. Local civics officials express considerable disillusionment with the ANC over a range of issues. Many focus group respondents used the terms 'civic' and 'SANCO' interchangeably, and expressed a unanimous view that civics should not be involved in politics. This may suggest a desire for SANCO to concentrate on local issues whether or not doing so is consistent with the position of the national ANC.

Heller and Ntlokonkulu argue that these dynamics suggest that CSOs' impact on democracy cannot be assessed purely on the strength of their relationship with government, as local civics' engagement with the state is limited. Political activity has shifted from representative structures to direct civic engagement. SANCO's impact is most acute in civil society, in politicising and constituting democratic citizens. SANCO's role also illustrate the extent to which the post-apartheid government has failed to bridge the gap between government and communities.

This analysis, however, is open to some important objections. Are local SANCO branches posited as an alternative to the democratic state? If so, how is their accountability and responsiveness to be ensured in the absence of regular elections in which the right to vote is universal? And from where, in the absence of resources and a bureaucracy, do they derive the capacity to act on the needs of local residents? If not, how do they inculcate democratic citizenship unless they engage with the state? The authors' finding that SANCO branches act as intermediaries between local government or public utilities on the one hand, citizens on the other, suggest that disengagement from the state is at best partial. Given the reservations noted here, partial disengagement is either a temporary expedient, a symptom of weak local government responsiveness, or a recipe for the entrenchment of unresponsive local power rather than enriched democracy.¹⁵

COSATU¹⁶ was launched in 1985 and by September 2000 it boasted 1,8m paid-up members organised in 19 affiliates. Its alliance with the ANC was the result of a contest between 'workerists' and 'populists' in its ranks; the former favoured an independent worker organisation, the latter one allied to the ANC tradition through the United Democratic Front. Those who argued for independence lost the battle, as the symbolic force of the ANC was too strong. One of their fears was that an alliance with the ANC would erode unions' internal democracy as strategic decisions would be taken in the political movement, not in COSATU. It appears, to date, that these fears were largely unfounded. In stark contrast to SANCO, COSATU, although an ally of the ANC, has significant impact on the policy process on behalf of its members, winning favourable labour law and defending these gains in the face of attempts from within the government to dismantle them. It has now formalised its engagement with elected government, opening a parliamentary office to monitor legislation and lobby various forums, including Portfolio Committees. Its influence is limited less by reliance on its political links as on its continued lack of capacity to address efficiently all the issues with which it wishes to engage.

Its closeness to the ANC has had a positive impact, since it enables the union federation to influence labour market policy, providing an additional voice to citizens who are also workers, by representing and advancing their interests. Although it has lost the battle over the government macroeconomic policy, GEAR, it has succeeded in slowing down implementation of some of its elements such as the privatisation of state industries, as the ANC is reluctant to alienate one of its largest constituencies. Its leadership does not hesitate to criticise the government in public where it perceives it or its policies to be contrary to members' interests. Added tension between COSATU public sector unions and the government is a consequence of the fact that union members encounter the government as an employer. COSATU's teacher union, SADTU, relates to the ANC-led government as an employer, and attempts to extract benefits for its members as employees. It argues that, as its

¹⁵ For an elaboration of the argument that civil society needs the democratic state to ensure accountability and responsiveness see Steven Friedman 'Bonaparte at the Barricades: The Colonisation of Civil Society' University of Natal (Durban), *Theoria*, No 79, May 1992

¹⁶ The COSATU affiliates selected for this study are the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM); the South Africa Democratic Teachers Union (South AfricaDTU) and South Africa Transport and Allied Workers Union (South AfricaTAWU)

political vision requires a country led by the ANC, it would encourage its members to vote for the ANC as a party, yet would fight it in government as an employer.

The closeness between the ANC government and COSATU does not compromise the latter's autonomy; some leaders of COSATU affiliates openly acknowledge that the time may come for a breakaway from the alliance. But others argue that the alliance affords it unique access to government, and that it would be a strategic error to jettison these opportunities by breaking away.

In general, COSATU is in a unique position to hold the government to account and enhance democracy. But its autonomy is not unqualified: it and its affiliates are allocated a quota of seats on the ANC list for election to Parliament and other legislatures, and there is a growing fear that this will impact on the unions' ability to act independently of government in securing workers' best interests, where the two hold divergent viewpoint. There are also concerns that guaranteed political representation could unleash careerism, and that those elected to political positions – or who have such ambitions - could compromise worker interests. COSATU's challenge is thus to maintain autonomy while exercising influence in the various forums such as NEDLAC and the Parliamentary Portfolio Committees which regularly consult it.

IDASA presents a case-study of an organisation which has been able to continually reinvent itself, as well as its relationship with government, in response to changes in the political opportunity structure and the strategies of foreign donors.

It was founded in 1986 by Alex Boraine and Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert, members of Parliament who believed that extra-parliamentary action was needed to end apartheid. It played a significant role in fostering negotiation between the white establishment and the ANC. By 1991, its focus had shifted to economic justice, education, human rights, media and grassroots involvement, and it also facilitated training for CSOs to develop and practice democracy, motivated by an attempt to ensure that democracy was established with active citizens' participation, and not exclusively by political leaders. In 1993, it concentrated its activities on the forthcoming 1994 election; training domestic observers, party election agents and voter educators were key activities. However, throughout this period, its focus on negotiations between a wide range of protagonists continued.

In 1994 it began reinventing itself under the new leadership of Wilmot James, to address the challenge of making democracy work, and responding to the donor threat of financial withdrawal. One of its main foci was to hold government account – a shift from promoting democracy to making it work better. In 1995, it changed its mission statement to focus entirely on institution building. This strategy was informed by the argument that key social goals cannot be achieved unless government structures are sound.

This increasing cooperation with government does not necessarily compromise its autonomy in principle: IDASA argues that it continues advocacy work through capacitating other organisations to lobby, and at times it engages in direct lobbying and criticism, through publications generated by its various programmes. According to Paul Graham, its executive director, its role is not to denounce the government, but to ascertain why it is not delivering on its promises since it believes that the government does not lack the political will, but capacity. According to James, Graham's predecessor, an adversarial rela-

tionship with the government could result in it ignoring IDASA, excluding it from participation in government institutions, effectively emasculating it. There is a concern within IDASA that exclusion from government cooperation is possibly already taking place – in some instances, the organisation is experiencing increasing difficulties in accessing government officials.

IDASA's strategy is a response to severe government criticism during the past few years which prompted it to seek an active partnership with it - it also coincides with donor preferences for CSO- government partnerships (see below). Its current challenge is to strike a balance between acting as a vehicle through which citizens can hold government to account, and working with the government in strengthening democratic institutions.

The WNC was born at the moment of transition from apartheid to democracy. The initial exclusion of women from the negotiating process, accompanied by strong leadership and clear strategic vision, resulted in the achievement of its initial objectives. Spearheaded by the ANC Women's League in the early 1990s, its original mandate was to include women in the negotiating process, and mobilise them around a Women's Charter to ensure the accommodation of their interests in the new constitution. As a result of its efforts, each party delegation was afforded one woman delegate with full voting rights, and 26 women became delegates in the second round of multi-party negotiations. Similarly, women were included on the technical committees. But, because they were representing political parties, party rather than women's issues predominated.

Although the Charter did not directly feed into the Constitution, the process which led to its adoption helped to mobilise women around the issues it addressed and, in the view of some analysts, helped to influence the constitution. Subsequent to the partial achievement of its original goals, it has had little impact on post-1994 government policy. This can be attributed to its inability to identify new interests around which women can be universally unified - or to dissolve if these issues do not exist; its original close relationship with the ANC; and its failure to find a critical voice. The WNC is premised on the assumption that the post-apartheid political opportunity structure makes it possible for women to unite despite different racial and political identities. But its failure to make an impact suggests either that this assumption is inaccurate or that it has failed to generate a strategy which might galvanise such an alliance.

The **North West Farmers' Organisations** relations with the state are indicated by their success in accessing productive resources, rather than in directly influencing policy. But their ability to access resources affects their organisational capacity, internal democratic structures and impact on democracy.

The Balemirui Farmers Association (BFA), in theory, is beyond the realm of the modern democratic state. It is embedded in traditional authority which posits itself as an alternative to elected government and is characterised by patronage and clientelism. On this reading, its members are subjects, not citizens and it thus antagonistic to, not a part of, civil society and the democratic state. It was incorporated into the patronage networks of the Mangope regime of the Bophuthatswana homeland, and enjoyed privileged access to its administration, regarded by the apartheid state as the legitimate government of the territory. It was also formed from the top down, on the insistence of the parastatal Agri-

cor, which subsidised the agricultural sector, that if rural farmers were to receive assistance they had to create an association. But while it fails to recognise the state, it cannot ignore it: all resources other than land are delivered by the state or market. Paradoxically, it continues to demand access to state resources, although it is wedded to pre-modern relationships which do not recognise the South Africa government. But its attitude to democratic structures and processes is one of contempt: its leaders regard the elected local council as 'a nuisance'. It fails to make any impact on the current government but, even if it did, the effect would arguably be to reward despotism, not to reflect enhanced citizen participation.¹⁷

The Moretele Farmers' Association (MFA), by contrast, is founded on the principle of organising citizens, rather than relying on traditional authority: it sees traditional leaders as 'totally useless'. While the BFA had land allocated to it under the jurisdiction of the local chief, most of the MFA's land was allocated by the Department of Land affairs after the 1994 elections. Under apartheid, both enjoyed some access to resources through farmer support institutions, but they now face austerity in the light of government cut-backs on farm subsidies. The MFA has arguably responded to the change in political opportunity structure but has been constrained by changes in the policy environment which it lacks the capacity to alter.

FABCOS was established in 1988, and initially had thirteen affiliated consumer groups and service providers. Its genesis was based on the premise that its contribution to the struggle against apartheid was to economically empower the politically disenfranchised through black economic empowerment strategies, to provide services for the development and empowerment of its members, and influence government policy to create conditions to assist black informal business to realise its full potential.

Its participation in NEDLAC and a presidential advisory group seems to have had little impact on government policy. It lacks representative value for its membership, and fails to provide black entrepreneurs and consumers with a decisive voice. This is despite the fact that, although initially unaligned to any of the liberation movements, FABCOS leadership explicitly rejects autonomy from the ANC government, arguing that its relationship is one of co-operation as a partner. While the IDASA study shows that those wishing to act in partnership with the government can strike a balance between partner and critic and the COSATU study illustrates that partners do not have to be silent, FABCOS has chosen almost blanket approval of the government: according to its national leadership, it has largely abandoned its advocacy role in favour of service provision. A possible explanation for its lack of impact on policy, is that its understanding of black economic empowerment endorses government policies, which tend to favour black ownership of large corporates rather than the small businesses which FABCOS favours. But the response of its membership suggests that affiliated black business groups do not share the leadership's contentment with current government approaches and might, therefore, favour a more assertive stance.

¹⁷ For an elaboration of the argument that traditional authority is a realm of despotism rather than the values and effects usually associated with civil society see Mahmood Mamdani *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996

In sum, the case studies do not support the argument that a partnership or alliance with the government is automatically a constraint to the autonomy or efficacy of CSOs. While it had clearly become that for FABCOS or SANCO's national leadership, it has not fettered COSATU or IDASA (although it has obviously placed some limits on them which are necessary consequences of an alliance). CSOs face a choice between substituting the relationship with the government for autonomous action and seeking to align the two - which one they adopt may be a consequence not only of strategic competence but also of the logic which underpins the organisation; it is more difficult for a trade union federation whose power depends on the willingness of members to act in concert to ignore the interests of members (who might ignore calls to act if it did). But reliance on a membership base is no guarantee of capacity to strike the required balance and the mix between autonomy and partnership will pose a constant challenge to CSOs sympathetic to the governing party.

But they show also that independence from the government is not enough to ensure effectiveness in the current political opportunity structure. WNC has failed to identify or mobilise a base which might enable it to unite women across the society's primary divisions, while the BFA has failed to adjust sufficiently to the new environment to enhance the interests of the elite which controls it, let alone its clients and the MFA has yet to generate the capacity which might enable it to enhance its members' interests. For those excluded from - or who have chosen to remove themselves - the ambit of partnership, the challenges of adjustment are as great as for those within it.

Internal democratic structure and process

It has been argued that democracy's advent in South Africa necessitated a restructuring of CSOs. Previously, many succeeded by operating at the grassroots and emphasising non-institutional resistance to the state. But democracy's rules requires their professionalisation and bureaucratisation. Often this results in the erosion of internal democracy; the reduction of decision-making and engagement with government to a technical issue; leadership alienation from constituencies and undermining of accountability; and demobilising the grassroots. But the evidence suggests that cognitive and organisational legacies of the struggle against apartheid – such as strikes and stayaways - are still practiced.

The impact of new methods of engagement with the post-1994 government is most starkly contrasted by a comparison between SANCO and COSATU.

Local SANCO activists and leaders of breakaway civic movements argue that as a national organisation, it has become so hierarchical and bureaucratised that internal democracy has become a sham, and branches have lost their autonomy. They argue that this cripples grassroots initiatives which fall prey to political machinations or organisational inertia.

But in many cases, while local civics adopt the name 'SANCO', higher level officials acknowledge that they have little knowledge of, or capacity to control, branch activities. Thus the notion of 'SANCO' or 'civic' is often a symbol, which has no automatic identification with a formal political agency. Although there are many examples of undemocratic and exclusionary practices at branch level, there are also examples of the democra-

tising impulse and impact of local civics. Heller and Ntlokonkulu identify the following suggested by their research: a high level of engagement of elected officials with members; a strong local commitment to an inclusionary SANCO; an operational, if not ideological, distancing from the ANC; and a pluralisation of civil society which has produced competition among civics (with varying affiliations), political parties and other interest groups for local support.

In general, COSATU structures are highly democratic, and its union affiliates continue to be run by workers themselves. Similarly to SANCO, there are differences in the extent of democratic participation at various organisational levels, but, contrary to it, participation is more vibrant at national than branch level, although here too, participation is uneven between union affiliates. Some analysts argue that this is a result of increased focus on 'bread and butter' issues, as a result of the fact that members can now vote for political parties. Others argue that it is a result of complacency, as South Africa now has some of the most labour-friendly legislation in the world; yet another argument is that precisely because of the growth of the federation, its necessary response has been to professionalise and concentrate operations at national level, at the expense of political demobilisation of the branches. Thus its success in influencing government policy through, at times, employing skilled consultants from outside the organisation, is a double-edged sword. Technocrats tend to be in charge of the parliamentary office and interact with government on behalf of the federation. Decisions often have to be made too quickly to allow consultation with members.

Whatever the reasons - and there is probably some truth in all of them - there is a reduction of COSATU's presence in the townships and its ability to directly connect with community interests and concerns, leading to a dilution of members' participation at the grassroots. These dynamics are particularly marked in SADTU.

Nevertheless democratic leadership and accountability survives. While the need to encourage united action may be one reason, it is also arguably a result of the fact that COSATU is led by people who have worked on the shop floor, and who have organically advanced into leadership through the union ranks. Leaders are chosen democratically and decision-making is dominated by the direct participation of workers, rather than elected officials. Participation of rank and file members continues to be lively and unrestrained at its congresses: at the 2000 National Congress, workers tackled issues in ways that sometimes placed them in direct opposition to government policy and the ANC.

COSATU has been able to respond far more effectively than SANCO to formalised governance structures, and is learning to engage and lobby government in formal forums and through alliance networks, partly as a result of its access to financial and human resources, which SANCO evidently lacks. And although its leaders are becoming more professionalised and are skilled negotiators and lobbyists, they have not become alienated from a lively, participatory membership which holds them to account - even if it may take constant membership vigilance to ensure that it is not increasingly run by technocrats. For now, democracy is alive and well in COSATU, as illustrated by the high level of delegate participation at the 2000 congress. Rules of engagement were strictly adhered to, and workers made points of order and challenged leadership. Again, their ability to en-

gage productively with national leadership could be a consequence of the fact that the union continues to be run by workers.

Although IDASA is not membership-based, an important indicator of public and government perceptions of its democracy-enhancing role is that it continues to win government tenders and to train town clerks, councillors, parliamentarians or other NGOs. This suggests that a non-membership based organisation can play an important role in building a culture of responsiveness and accountability.

But the substance of IDASA's partnership with government- in which it seems to face demands to improve the technical capacity of governance structures, representatives, and officials – poses a challenge to it in the face of evidence that citizens value government responsiveness above technical efficiency. A further challenge to its credibility is the reality that it was born out of white politics, and that many of its prominent officers are white. It thus risks being labelled 'unrepresentative', a possibility which makes the formation of alliances with black-led CSOs (such as COSATU) essential.

Although originally the internal structures and processes of the WNC were highly democratic, and links with affiliates strong, it has failed to sustain contact with its affiliates. This has dire implications for its democratic efficacy: it is not clear whom it represents or the exact nature of its mandate. Another consequence is that its national Gauteng-based committee has lost touch with its organic roots, and instead of being driven from the bottom, it is now rudderlessly steered from the top.

FABCOS is largely criticised by its affiliates as having failed to sustain links between its national, provincial and sectoral structures; and as being elite-dominated and motivated. Its officials are salaried - leadership argues that this makes the organisation more democratic, as withdrawal of support could mean the loss of a job and income. Those who work on a voluntary basis cannot be held accountable, as they have nothing to lose should they be voted out of office. But members tend to hold a different view: many argue that precisely because leaders are salaried and involved in their own business activities, they are not committed to leading the organisation. Those who run provincial offices are not empowered to assist members with substantive issues.

It is perhaps significant that the CSO with the most vigorous internal democracy relies strongly on formal procedures to ensure accountability and responsiveness and to ensure participation. Far from being a stiff formal tool restraining initiative, procedure is an essential protection against the unrestrained use of power by the strongest figures in an organisation or society: COSATU's experience tends to confirm this. And, while some advocates of direct action may decry reduced levels of mobilisation, this may reflect the current preferences of members rather than the impositions of leaders. By contrast, local action in SANCO tends to occur despite rather than because of the organisation's leadership; while this may prompt considerable energy, it is not necessarily either sustainable or subject to democratic control.

And, while COSATU's influence over labour law may owe much to the politics of the ANC alliance, it may be of some interest that the membership-based organisation with the most active internal democracy is also the most influential. While the link between internal democracy and effectiveness may not be as direct as democrats would like, both WNC

and FABCOS may well enjoy more influence if they were able to mobilise constituents. Since both happily lack the capacity to coerce participation in campaigns, strengthened relationship between members and leaders may be essential if a desire to exert influence is to become reality.

Origins and loyalties

Identity politics, based largely on race, and the ANC's historical dominance in representing the interests of the black majority, has been a defining feature of the organisation of civil society. This inheritance can result in CSOs promoting exclusionary and therefore possibly anti-democratic agendas.

But some of the organisational studies suggest that this legacy can be weakened by factors such as the primacy of CSO members' interest calculations over identity politics; and the influence of other ascribed identities, such as gender. This is not to say that CSO members abandon their primary (racial and political) identities but that they are able at times to prioritise their 'secondary' identity as long as doing so does not force them to abandon a primary one. Black women ANC members do not, therefore, abandon this identity to work with white women who support the official opposition for common women's goals. But neither does their racial and political identity prompt them to abandon their interest in gender equity. The end of apartheid and the struggle against it has thus created the space for CSOs to be more representative of a multiplicity of interests, resulting in a greater pluralisation of society and potential for alliances in civil society across racial and political barriers.

At the national level, SANCO is characterised chiefly by identity politics and allegiance to the ANC. But at branch level, interest politics becomes an additional factor, while racial identity remains relevant. It is criticised – internally and externally - for claiming to represent the entire 'community', a term which usually refers to black residents of townships or shack settlements. Since its members are a small percentage of 'communities' with very different and, at times, conflicting and contradictory interests, these claims are disingenuous and can crowd out other interests and silence alternative voices, a threat increased by its proximity to the governing party. Research indicating the growth of pluralism at the local level suggests that this threat is being contained, at least for the moment.

While COSATU is, in principle, committed to non-racialism and white workers are free to join its affiliates, the legacy of the wage gap between black and white workers and its alliance with the ANC has resulted in it being based largely on black identity with a strong class dimension. There is, however, increasing evidence that the role of COSATU in mobilising more broadly around political identity, is becoming dominated by the interest calculations of its members (although this trend is also uneven between the union affiliates studied). There is also evidence that this, in some instances, is diluting its political coherence and the identification of affiliates' members with COSATU: when teachers who are members of SADTU were asked why they did not participate in a COSATU stayaway, they replied that they were members of SADTU, not COSATU. Again, a possible explanation is the normalisation of politics. The increasing primacy of interest calculations over politi-

cal identity is also resulting, in some instances, in professional interests taking precedence over racial identity: some members of SADTU are white teachers, and recently its president, Willie Madisha, claimed to favour a union of teacher interests through the amalgamation of SADTU and NAPTOSA – a professional teachers’ organisation which has relatively conservative white affiliates. These dynamics arguably have democracy-enhancing effects, as they build a solidarity which cuts across racial divides and encourages more tolerance within the political system.

The study of the WNC raises the possibility of a large constituency being able to unite across racial identity divides to increase democracy, not only through broadening the representation of women, but also by providing a source for unity across the primary divides which might increase political tolerance by ensuring that those in the political majority may work with those in the minority and *vice versa*. This enhances the effectiveness of the CSO - since it cannot be dismissed purely as a vehicle for a particular racial group - and reduces potential for social conflict by ensuring that some citizens who are in conflict over political identities also co-operate as women (or workers or city residents). The study reveals that gender identity was strong enough to ensure a coalition in favour of women’s participation at the negotiations and, later, to prompt some women to ignore the ANC Womens’ League’s wish that they withdraw from WNC but not strong enough to impel women at the negotiations to pursue women’s issues rather than the concerns of their parties alone - or to ensure continued co-operation across the traditional divides for very long after democracy’s advent.

But, while WNC has stagnated, a range of women’s organisations has emerged which mobilise around issues affecting women across race and class divides. Thus, as much as the study of the WNC tends to suggest that it is not possible for an organisation to represent the interests of all South Africa women, so does this co-operation suggest that there is room for issue-based alliances across the divides. But it is worth noting also that, after the Charter campaign, the interests of black women came to dominate the WNC - at least in the perception of white Afrikaans Women’s organisations which withdrew because they felt that the WNC was a black women’s organisation. So, as suggested above, the paradox of identity is that race and political loyalty remain central but there that there is substantial scope for co-operation across the divides they create - but that it is only possible if the importance of the primary divisions, and the limits they set on joint action, are recognised and respected.

Another possible explanation for the current status of the Coalition is that its founding impulse was not organic; instead it was orchestrated from above by political parties. In civil society theory, CSOs are autonomous from the political sphere of parliaments and political parties, and are voluntarily and autonomously organised by, and aggregate complementary interests of, citizens. They are an additional form of representation to formal governance structures, and give interests a louder voice. Given the extent to which the initial objective of the Coalition was to ensure women’s representation within these structures, the inevitable logic, in this argument, was that either the Coalition would die a natural death subsequent to the achievement of these objectives, or it would have to reinvent itself in response to changes in the political opportunity structure, which included

the realisation of its original goals. The former is what happened, with many independent women's groups dissolving themselves into the Women's League rather than aligning with the Coalition.

But the League was forced to rejoin WNC in 1996, having failed to shut it down, and was forced to concede, in principle, a need for a women's voice which transcends party politics. Again, this dynamic indicates the scope for expression of 'secondary' identities while the 'primary' ones remain influential.

FABCOS is based on racial identity, but has largely failed, as it underestimated the interest calculations of its members. The black rand campaign, which sought to encourage consumers to support black entrepreneurs and to keep the rand circulating within black business as long as possible had little impact since black consumers – most of whom have relatively low incomes – were more concerned to cut costs than to express their identity. And black entrepreneurs seem, according to FABCOS leaders, more concerned with gaining tenders than with expressing racial solidarity. But FABCOS continues to stress racial identity and spurns overtures from white business organisations, arguing that this would undermine black economic empowerment. But its understanding this concept tends to favour the creation and empowerment of a small black elite, which, after a brief ascent, now appears to be in decline.

Again, FABCOS's failure to persuade consumers and business people to place identity before interest suggests, along with other evidence marshalled here, that racial identity is not an all-powerful source of loyalty in post-apartheid civil society. But the fact that COSATU remains in alliance with the ANC, that election results suggest that the vast majority of black CSO activists and members continue to vote for the governing party even as they reject many of its actions and policies, is a reminder that racial identity and the political allegiances it produces are a long way from being replaced by interests or by alternative identities. Rather, a pattern in which interests and other identities will continue to be pursued as long as doing so does not appear to compromise continued allegiance to a racial and political camp seems set to endure.

The impact of donor funding

What role have donors played in the development of these organisations and in enhancing or obstructing their capacity to give citizens a voice and to enhance democratic values? Has their impact on CSOs enhanced or hampered citizen capacity to hold government accountable?

It is indicative of a substantial shift in the funding climate that the initial answer is that donors are largely conspicuous by their absence: only two of the organisations studied currently receive donor funding. One is the only one which does not recruit members - IDASA - and the other, COSATU, receives highly targeted support on which it does not depend for its survival. FABCOS once received donor support but later adopted an investment strategy which removed the need for it, NWC and SANCO would like to receive donor funding but do not and the two farmers' organisations appear never to have considered approaching donors.

The logical consequence - that donors are very reluctant to support CSOs unless they are comprised only of professionals - is oversimplified. First, some do make grants to membership-based organisations, albeit not those studied in this project. The European Union claims to support trade unions,¹⁸ although COSATU does not appear to benefit from its programme and the Canadian International Development Agency reports a plan to support a partnership between the South Africa Nursing Association (Sana) and its Canadian counterpart - although the goal is to enhance action against AIDS, not Sana's capacity to represent its members.¹⁹ The British Department for International Development (DFID) reports supporting the National Network on Violence against Women.²⁰

And non-governmental donor agencies - those which are entirely private or which represent political philosophies such as the German party foundations - are far more inclined to support membership CSOs. The German Social Democratic foundation, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, notes that: 'We have the sole mandate of the German Trade Union Federation to speak and act on her behalf and, of course, this also means that we have to maintain special relations with organisations friendly to the DGB (the German trade union Federation) and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions'.²¹ This includes COSATU, which receives regular policy and information support from FES, while the German government's development agency, GTZ, funds COSATU and its research arm, Naledi, through its skills development and training programme although it notes that this was 'an issue' since COSATU is affiliated to a political party and it is not meant to support parties - the support could also be seen as trespassing on the labour movement's territory.²² FES's Green Party counterpart, the Heinrich Boell Foundation, funds the Self-Employed Women's Union.²³ Interfund, a consortium of international non-governmental funders, reports a switch in priorities from support for specialist NGOs to 'community based organisations'.²⁴

These examples caution against too sweeping an analysis of donor funding patterns. They also begin to highlight an important distinction: general references to 'donors' fail to acknowledge a significant difference between official donor funding - that disbursed by governments and their agencies - and non-governmental funding, in which is included the work of the German party foundations. Before 1994, the distinction was blurred by the illegitimacy of the South Africa government, which prompted official as well as non-governmental donors to fund only CSOs. Since 1994, governmental donors, in the main,

¹⁸ CPS Interview with Francois Dronnet, European Union, Pretoria, 20/4/2001; www.eusa.org.za/Content/Background/TheEUinSouthAfrica.htm

¹⁹ CPS Interview, Steve Hallihan, CIDA Representative Canadian High Commission, Pretoria, 20/4/01

²⁰ CPS Interview, Bridget Dillon, DFID Social Development Advisor, Pretoria, [CHECK DATE WITH DUMI-South AfricaNI]

²¹ Answers to questionnaire sent to Ulrich Golaszinski, head, Friederich Ebert Stiftung South Africa, 9/4/01

²² Interview with Helmut Orbon, GTZ, Pretoria, 5/4/01.

²³ CPS Interview, Sigrid Thomsen, Southern Africa representative, Heinrich Boell Foundation, 28/3/01

²⁴ CPS Interview, Kgotatso Semela, Programme Co-Ordinator, Interfund 26/4/01, 3/5/01

accord priority to working with the South Africa government.²⁵ This does not necessarily exclude support for CSOs, but generally means that they are expected to work in partnership with the South Africa government, a stipulation which may restrict their capacity to engage in vigorous advocacy – in some cases this is implicit in the choice of projects²⁶ in others – as in the case of the American funder, USAID, the insistence on partnership is explicit;²⁷ one donor noted that it was ‘now time for NGOs to work constructively with government’.²⁸ And in some cases, apparent exceptions appear only to confirm the rule. Thus the Dutch government stresses its enthusiasm for support to civil society, including for advocacy work. But it also says it favours a CSO approach which recognises ‘that government has taken the lead in the new South Africa and that it does not make very much sense to undertake programmes which are in direct opposition to government’. It thus attempts to discover a collective state-civil society position on issues²⁹, an approach which appears to assume that disagreement between the government and CSOs, which democrats might see as the stuff of democracy, is dysfunctional to the health of the system in South Africa. Even where donors insist that they do fund public advocacy by CSOs – the European Union is a case in point³⁰ – all grants must be approved by the South Africa government, creating a potential veto on ‘troublesome’ CSOs. It may also be significant that the EU has provided substantial resources for the National Development Agency, the government NGO funding mechanism which contends that advocacy ‘falls strictly outside (its) ambit: its central mission is not to transform government or realign its programmes but to act in support of it’.³¹ Non-governmental donors are more likely, by contrast, to support CSOs.³²

A further potential gap between the two opens up on the rationale for funding. A common theme among governmental donors is a stress on technical governance assistance. The Japanese Embassy asserts that democracy is a system in which ‘everyone has the potential to participate in their government’, adding that this goal is best achieved by improving education and health delivery.³³ Democracy is reduced to enhancing the knowledge and health of citizens through more effective government delivery. DFID believes that democracy will be assisted best by strengthening state performance.³⁴ Austra-

²⁵ Interview, Orbon, *op. cit.*, who argues that this approach is correcting a ‘historical bias’ against the state; Interview, Hallihan; CPS Interview with Amanda Gillet, Ausaid 28/2/01; CPS Interview with Yoko Doi, Special Assistant for Development, Embassy of Japan, Development Assistance Section, Pretoria, 9/4/01; Interview, Dillon

²⁶ See for example Interviews, Hallihan, Doi

²⁷ See documents cited in Heller and Ntlokonkulu, *op.cit*

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ CPS Interview, Yvette van Eeckhout, Dutch Embassy, Pretoria, 7/3/01

³⁰ Interview, Dronnet

³¹ CPS Interview with Eric Molobi, first chair, NDA 5/4/01

³² Interview, Thomsen, Golaszinski responses; CPS Interview, Gerry Salole, Resident Representative, Ford Foundation, 23/4/01; Interview, Semela

³³ Interview, Doi

³⁴ Interview, Dillon, who leavens the point to a degree by adding that DFID prefers programmes which ‘put people first’ and entail public-private partnership.

lia's Ausaid asserts that 'good governance should underline everything that co-operation encompasses'. Its strategy assumes that 'investments in further education of government officials will lead to improved governance', which task is accomplished by sending Australian experts on short trips to South Africa.³⁵

A notable apparent exception is the European Union, which sets aside funds for Consolidation of Democracy, Good Governance and Civil Society - in 2000, about 23% of total funding. It includes funding for parliament (rather than the government officials usually favoured by aid donors) and supports 'strengthening a culture of human rights (and) public advocacy. But, while this commitment to the non-technical elements of democracy is significant, it remains subject to the approval of the South Africa government whose governing party, according to one donor, 'does not come out and say they are against advocacy groups. What they say is that they don't need help with democracy, they need help with governance.'³⁶ And its 1999 priority - capacity building of the victim empowerment sector (as well as unspecified NGOs),³⁷ while a vital element of the society's needs is not an area where significant difference with the government is likely.

Non-governmental donors are likely to be far more willing to acknowledge a set of values or political goals behind their funding. The German party foundations are bound by their mandate to support only organisations and activities consistent with their political goals and all stress the need to ensure that activities and partners meet their political criteria.³⁸ Thus FES says it does not 'just think of democracy as a machine invented by some Frenchmen, but ... it also has to prevail in the economy, and also has a social dimension'.³⁹ The Konrad Adenauer Foundation, although vaguer, declares a leaning towards federalism.⁴⁰ Other non-governmental donors are concerned to spell out a set of values which, in many cases, are far removed from a concern purely with the techniques of governance. The Open Society Foundation for South Africa declares a commitment to 'promoting the values, institutions and practices of an open, civil and democratic society' adding that 'it will work for a vigorous and autonomous civil society, not dominated by the state, in which minorities and divergent opinions are respected.'⁴¹ It therefore aims to foster conditions in which democracy can grow and to create an enabling environment for civil society participation in this process of democratisation.⁴² Interfund insists that the governed must participate in government and enjoy the information which enables them to do so - they require wide knowledge of their choices.⁴³ The Ford Foundation

³⁵ Interview, Gillet

³⁶ Heller and Ntlokonkulu, op.cit.

³⁷ Interview, Dronnet

³⁸ Interview, Thomsen

³⁹ Golaszinski responses

⁴⁰ CPS Interview with Dr Michael Lange, Representative, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Johannesburg.

⁴¹ www.osf.org.za

⁴² Response to questions sent to Zohra Dawood, Director, Open Society Foundation, 24/401, (received via e-mail).

⁴³ Interview, Semela

declares that it seeks to ‘strengthen democratic values, reduce poverty and injustice, promote international co-operation and advance human achievement’.⁴⁴

At first glance, despite these distinctions, the stated agendas of the official and non-governmental donors do not display a clear pattern. Donors such as DFID and Ausaid, which stress technical assistance to the South Africa government, are either contemplating a programme to assist CSOs⁴⁵ or they already do so through a separate NGO funding programme⁴⁶. While Japan seems to restrict itself entirely to technical assistance to the South Africa government, Germany, through GTZ, as noted above, supports COSATU. While some, such as USAID with its stress on partnership, or Australia, or Denmark⁴⁷ seem largely to endorse the government agenda, the Dutch government says that if it is not in direct agreement with an South African government policy stance, it will support advocacy groups who present its position to facilitate a broader debate on the issue.⁴⁸ And, despite non-governmental donors’ greater commitment to supporting CSOs, a tendency to, in the main, support NGOs rather than membership-based citizens’ organisations extends to both.

However, beyond this rather bland conclusion lies a more significant reality. Most official donors tend to support CSOs only when they operate in partnership with the South Africa government. In some cases, such as USAID and DFID, the preference for partnership is explicit⁴⁹. Elsewhere it is implied, whether by GTZ’s interest in promoting NGO-government ‘interaction’⁵⁰ or Holland’s desire to achieve a government - civil society consensus on area of intervention.⁵¹ Indeed, this last example is significant for it is the Dutch government which, as noted above, purports to be most interested in supporting advocacy; this preference places this in context. And the EU, which also suggests an interest in supporting advocacy work, actively encourages NGO-government partnerships. An indication of its reliance on government approval is the fact that the Board of the EU Human Rights Programme (EUHRO), which was given money to give to South Africa organisations promoting human rights, was initially appointed by the Department of Justice with which the EU was working in 1994.⁵² In sum, even those official donors interviewed who purport an interest in programmes which enhance citizen access to decisions seek to channel it through CSO-government partnerships.

Despite the rhetoric of citizen engagement offered by some governmental donors, then, the evidence is overwhelming that CSOs receive support from most official donors only to the extent that the South Africa government believes their actions are consistent with its goals. This is largely sufficient to rule out a significant role by any of these do-

⁴⁴ Interview, Salole

⁴⁵ Interview, Dillion

⁴⁶ Interview, Gillet

⁴⁷ See Kabemba and Friedman

⁴⁸ Interview, van Eeckhout

⁴⁹ Interview, Dillion

⁵⁰ Interview, Orbon

⁵¹ Interview, van Eeckhout

⁵² Interview, Dronnet

nors in building South Africa democracy - indeed, it could be argued that the effect is to ensure that they are, if anything, an obstacle to democratisation. In principle, the implication that CSOs exist largely as implementing agents for government decisions is a fundamental misunderstanding of their role: as noted at the outset of this paper, their function is to provide citizens with a voice to hold government to account, not to provide it with an additional governance tool. In practice in South Africa at present, the effect is to endorse a strongly held view among many influential figures in government that CSOs ought to abandon or mute their role as articulators of citizen concerns in order to assist the government agenda.

The bulk of official donors, therefore, actively encourage a form of CSO subservience which would, in their own countries, be justifiably seen as a severe abridgement of citizens' rights.⁵³ While our IDASA study shows that in some cases possible for CSOs to engage in direct partnership with the government and continue to pursue democratic goals, the implied insistence that this is the only strategic route for CSOs who seek support - to insist, for example, that AIDS activists may receive funds if they open a hospice but not if they campaign for access to medication - is to place civil society in a strait-jacket which will severely limit citizens' capacity to use the rights conferred on them by the constitution. And, while our interviews do show that advocacy CSOs could approach the non-governmental donors, official donor aid comprises by far the lion's share of that available in South Africa and therefore fundamentally shapes the environment in which CSOs operate.

Further evidence that official donors do not seem to comprehend the nature of civil society or its role in democracy is illustrated by the claim of the Dutch government that it discusses its proposed interventions with 'civil society'.⁵⁴ Implicit in the democratic understanding of civil society is its diversity - it may comprise literally tens of thousands of organisations with highly diverse values and interests: it is simply not possible for a single funder to consult 'civil society'. This approach - which, if practice is a guide, may be more common to donors than our interviews suggest - implies that a narrow range of organisations have been anointed as 'civil society' and that a voice has been denied to the rest. The negative effect on democratic development is clear. More generally, donors - and here the distinction between official and non-governmental funders blurs - seem largely unable to comprehend of a civil society which stretches beyond NGOs; to name but one example, Canada's CSO partnerships are currently restricted to four NGOs and the semi-official South Africa Qualifications Authority.⁵⁵ This clearly leaves the vast majority of those citizens who organise into associations outside the charmed funding circle⁵⁶ and ensures that the dominant form of donor aid in South Africa is one which, far from

⁵³ For an elaboration of this argument see Kabemba and Friedman

⁵⁴ Interview, van Eeckhout

⁵⁵ Interview, Hallihan

⁵⁶ For a critical discussion of the limits of most donors' understanding of civil society in the South generally, see Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers 'The Burgeoning World of Civil Society Aid' in Ottaway and Carothers (eds.) *Funding Virtue: Civil Society Aid and Democracy Promotion*, Washington DC, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000

contributing to citizen capacity to hold democratic government to account, shoehorns a narrow section of civil society into a partnership with the government and ignores the rest.

Why do donors who so regularly declare their commitment to democracy adopt a strategy so clearly designed to frustrate its growth? As our IDASA studies notes, one view, influential on the left,⁵⁷ is that donors consciously avoid particular organisations because their radicalism might threaten the property rights which donor countries are so determined to protect.⁵⁸ One scholarly approach, drawing on a similar analysis, sees donor strategies merely as a tool for entrenching the power of the rich and powerful states over the poor and weak ones.⁵⁹ But these views leave much unexplained. Why does the German government fund the socialist COSATU? Why did USAID fund the Institute for African Alternatives, which was articulate in its denunciation of the international financial institutions and the market economy? There are many other examples. In addition, these analyses may be circular arguments. Because rich countries are assumed to dominate poor ones and donor agencies are instruments of rich countries, they must be designed to dominate. And in many cases, the critics breathlessly reveal that donors pursue agendas, such as the strengthening of liberal democracy and the market economy, which all would not only cheerfully admit to following but which are often proclaimed in their promotional literature! As servants of countries in which both liberal democracy and market economies are the subjects of wide consensus, these donors would be betraying the preferences of the citizens who pay their salaries were they to adopt any other approach.

A second school, seemingly far apart from this but in an important sense similar, sees donors as potentially useful agents of democracy but is critical of their failure to follow a 'coherent' strategy. Much intellectual effort is then devoted to attempts to persuade donor agencies and their staff to adopt a clear set of goals which will ensure effectiveness.⁶⁰ Unlike the first one, this approach is capable of generating ideas which enhance donor practice and strategy. But it may show some similarities to the first in its common assumption that official donor agencies can generate development strategies internally consistent and appropriate enough to local conditions to enhance democracy. This is open to serious question in practice and principle.

The argument in practice is best made by a senior non-governmental donor.⁶¹ He notes that donors have two competing conceptions of democracy and effective governance which influence their funding criteria. On the one hand is support of effective func-

⁵⁷ Comment by COSATU participation, CPS seminar on Civil Society and Donor Funding, Johannesburg, 21/5/01

⁵⁸ GTZ explicitly regards support for a market economy as a condition for aid - Interview, Orbon. In most cases, this stipulation is implied.

⁵⁹ Julie Hearne 'Aiding Democracy? Donors and Civil Society in South Africa' *Third World Quarterly*, Vol 21, No 5, 2000 pp 815-830

⁶⁰ See for example Hilde Selbervik *Aid as tool for promotion of human rights and democracy: What can Norway do?* Christen Michelsen Institute Evaluation Report 7.97, Report submitted to Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Chr. Michelsen Institute, Bergen, Norway, 1997

⁶¹ CPS Interview with Gerald Kraak, former editor of *Development Update* and former deputy director of Interfund, 17/4/01.

tioning of formal democratic government institutions - CSO funding is avoided since democracy is understood purely as administration - and for institutions supporting constitutional democracy, as outlined in Chapter 9 of the constitution as well as broad civic education on the contents of the constitution and human rights and voter education, again an expression of commitment to formal institutions. On the other, support of sectors and issues which were historically neglected and whose rights have now been recognised by the constitution, such as women, farmworkers, the disabled and people living with HIV/AIDS or funding for para-legal institutions in order to advance the rights of marginalised groups, an approach which seeks to 'make governance institutions work by subjecting them to pressure from groups to whom they are accountable'. It sees the approach of the first group as 'fundamentally flawed' as it does not necessarily enhance democracy by making institutions representative or accountable to the citizenry: 'civic education' is either thinly spread or piecemeal. CSOs which struggle to secure funds from either approach are those which represent interests groups whose rights are not constitutionally enshrined and who are advocating around political issues 'with a small 'p', such as Gun-Free South Africa.

But where does the official strategy come from? He argues that official donors base their funding strategies on previous experience of funding transitional democracies. Thus many choose to fund training and capacity-building of formal governance institutions. Some do commission research to identify funding needs, but many government donor strategies are 'idiosyncratic' and determined by the perceptions of staff at any particular time. While donor strategies sometimes respond to current political realities - such as the early 1990s stress on mediation and reconciliation - issues are often fashionable or fad-dish. Some major donors preference for CSO financial support is often not based on research or a sound understanding of CSO problems or needs. Although there are skills shortages, the problem is lack of familiarity with the workings, dynamics and culture of the NGO/CSO sector among people who are being drawn from the general market into it. The donors also fail to understand that the sector for whom they are training people is not competitive, and that its self-image is poor.

In this view, donors tend not to monitor their contribution to democracy and governance; they lack the infrastructure, money and time to do so. Monitoring is largely dependent on financial and narrative reports from recipients of donor funding; on quantitative indicators (such as how many workshops are held rather than their impact), which very often are misleading and signify very little; and short-term outcomes. The criticism does not only apply to governmental donors. Most donors select beneficiaries on the basis of: whether or not they are a legally registered entity, their governing structures - although these are not always carefully evaluated - financial controls and race and gender composition, although affirmative action on the basis of race supersedes that of gender in importance. The internal democratic structures and processes of beneficiary organisations are hardly, if ever, a criterion: donors do not relate improvements in CSOs' internal democracy to broader democratisation and effective governance.

This is, of course, hardly a picture of actors implementing a coherent and considered agenda. And while it is argued that the problem could be addressed by more co-

operation, communication and co-ordination between donors,⁶² there are reasons to suggest that the obstacles to the development of coherent donor democratisation strategies is structural, not accidental. Several criteria combine to limit capacity to generate them.

First, official donors are not only in a Southern country to pursue coherent donor objectives - they are also engaged in a bilateral relationship⁶³ with the recipient country. Where the stated goals of 'coherent' programmes impede that relationship, the coherence may well be the victim. Thus the USAID programme criticised here is less the consequence of a considered strategic approach as of an attack on the funder by President Mandela and senior government officials in late 1997 which prompted a sharp switch of priorities from an overwhelmingly CSO- oriented programme to one concentrated either on the government or on CSOs willing to engage in partnerships with it. And the British commitment to a strategy focused exclusively on the eradication of poverty is likely to stray from this intention if the immediate priorities of its partner lie elsewhere (not necessarily in anti-poor strategies, but in concerns largely irrelevant to the concerns of the poor).⁶⁴

Second and similarly, domestic political considerations may play a significant role in 'strategic calculations'. To be sure, this varies depending on the extent to which foreign aid is a contentious domestic issue and to which it is subject to the domestic political process. Again, USAID's activities are perhaps the most politicised, leading initially - in the 1980s - to a programme designed largely to win the approval of the Congressional Black Caucus (and thus overwhelmingly favourable to organisations affiliated to the United Democratic Front which in 1990 merged into the ANC) followed, as Congressional Republicans reacted against this, to one probably more concerned to balance the desires of conflicting US constituencies than with aiding South Africa democracy. But even in countries in which aid has far less domestic resonance, choices such as the preference for short term or quantifiable results or for 'bricks and mortar' rather than, say, enhanced feelings of citizen efficacy are attempts to demonstrate effectiveness to domestic constituencies in ways which may not necessarily be helpful to South Africa democratization. Australia, according to Ausaid, would not even be dispensing aid here if domestic NGOs had not pressed the government to do so.⁶⁵

Third, some donors may simply be thwarted by unfavourable local political realities. This is more likely when they are pursuing a particular set of political goals, as the German political foundations are. Thus, while the Christian Democratic Adenauer Foundation joins the other foundations in stressing the need to work with like-minded political partners, it has, since the 1980s when it enthusiastically supported the Inkatha Freedom Party, looked in vain for a partner and is currently reduced to funding only a Durban-based democracy promotion NGO - and the Urban Sector Network, a collection of NGOs

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Centre for Policy Studies *Governance and the South Africa Poor: British Aid Strategy and Poverty Elimination*, Paper commissioned by Department for International Development, Pretoria, unpublished

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ Interview, Gillet

firmly within the ANC tradition!⁶⁶ It is an open question whether this is a result of lack of ‘coherence’ or the reality that some political products lack firm allies in some societies.

Fourth and finally, official donor programme officers are often people with little direct experience of or rootedness in the countries which they are meant to help democratise. While some donor agencies do, like their non-governmental equivalents, hire country or area specialists, many officers may be posted to countries for relatively short periods and may report to superiors with even less direct country knowledge than they. The problem increases significantly once formerly authoritarian countries democratise and the ‘black and white’ struggle between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ becomes a complex process in which fine judgment and deep-rooted local knowledge is crucial. To illustrate, an South Africa analyst concerned at the lack of coherence in donor programmes here may reflect on how confident he or she might feel about devising a democratisation strategy for, say, Nicaragua or Thailand. The claim of one USAID officer that identifying appropriate CSO partners is easy because: ‘We know the townships. You can go to meetings, talk to community activists, and figure it out’⁶⁷ may well have applied during the apartheid period when it funded UDF-allied CSOs (it hardly needed advanced training to discover the identity of the local UDF affiliates, particularly when the relevant programme officer was, as this one is, South African). But there is no evidence that it is apposite to the post-apartheid climate in which, as our organisational studies show, profoundly democratic and anti-democratic tendencies can co-exist in the same organisation. Given this complexity, it is no surprise that donors may rely on other donors - and local churches or NGOs - to identify partners, as Ausaid said it does.⁶⁸ While word of mouth of this sort may benefit CSOs such as IDASA, it may also become a self-reinforcing circle in which the prejudices of the last generation of programme officers are passed on to the next. In this context, communication between donors will need to become highly self-critical and reflective if it is to avoid this trap. Nor is it a surprise that, as the IDASA study shows, some donor officers are more inclined to base decisions on the quality of the financial and activity reports they receive as on an assessment of CSO impact.

It should also be stressed that, while non-governmental donors are often more likely to be able to rely on specialists with local knowledge and a sense of vocation, they are not immune from the problem. Thus some non-governmental programmes also suffer from an inappropriate quantitative stress and a concern for the short-term.⁶⁹ The Ford Foundation’s resident representative notes that this funder, regarded with justification as perhaps the most sophisticated private funder in the world (and which relies heavily on appointing academic specialists to decision-making posts) is itself highly ‘idiosyncratic’; its agenda is shaped by the decisions of country programme officers - which often differ sharply from each other - rather than by an overarching agenda.

These reservations are of particular importance if it is accepted that enhanced donor funding for CSOs in general, and for the grassroots membership based organisations

⁶⁶ Interview, Lange

⁶⁷ Interview with Harold Motshwane, USAID, Pretoria

⁶⁸ Interview, Gillet

⁶⁹ Interview, Kraak

which are now largely ignored in particular, is critical. Certainly, the organisational studies counsel some circumspection here since not all the CSOs studied would necessarily be strengthened by donor funding. While COSATU does receive support for specific activities, such as its research arm, Naledi, its access to union dues automatically deducted by employers obligated to do so by bargaining agreements has made it not only self-sufficient, but wealthy enough to launch investment companies with surplus funds.⁷⁰ FABCOS has become self-sufficient by establishing an investment company while the WNC's lack of access to funding is a consequence, not a cause, of its current weakness; absent a strategy, no amount of funding is likely to strengthen it. One of the two farmers' associations (the BFA) is a cautionary lesson to funders tempted to romanticise grassroots organisations - since it would be likely to use funds to entrench patronage relations.

Nevertheless, since both FABCOS and COSATU benefited from donor funding in their formative period when substantial capacity gaps existed - and COSATU still feels the need for targeted support for activities such as research - it seems likely that SANCO, and perhaps also the MFA and other small grassroots CSOs, could benefit significantly from donor funding provided it is strategically targeted at real needs and does not distort priorities by loading organisations with expensive and inappropriate technologies or systems which may do more to smother them than assist their growth. SANCO's desire for training in public policy issues is one example⁷¹ - Ausaid's consideration of an initiative to help small CSOs write proposals⁷² may be another.

But this continues to beg a question. Given the constraints noted here, how are donors to identify the bearers of democratic potential from the grassroots demagogues, articulators of local needs from potential miscreants? After all, while our organisational study presents a compelling argument for SANCO funding, a local donor whose political background disposes him to look favourably on civics notes that SANCO funding was ended by the NDA because of doubts about its accountability.⁷³ For some, the question is likely to remain hypothetical, since they endorse the current antipathy among donors to funding grassroots CSOs.⁷⁴ Others, while committed to citizen participation in public life, conclude that their resource limitations preclude a stress on support for grassroots CSOs.⁷⁵ But those donors convinced of the merits of funding citizens groups at the grassroots,⁷⁶ face a perplexing search for viable methods.

The obvious remedy is to rely on NGOs to help build the capacity of grassroots CSOs. This clearly poses risks,⁷⁷ of which the most obvious is that the NGOs may become 'gatekeepers', making largely arbitrary choices about who to feed and who to let starve. But the use of intermediaries may not necessarily entail 'gatekeeping'. Thus IDASA's Budget

⁷⁰ Mackay and Matoho

⁷¹ Heller and Ntlokonkulu, *op.cit*

⁷² Interview, Gillet

⁷³ Interview, Molobi

⁷⁴ Heller and Ntlokonkulu, *op.cit*

⁷⁵ Interview, Salole; Golaszinski responses

⁷⁶ Discussions with Norwegian Aid Agency officials, Johannesburg, June 2001

⁷⁷ Heller and Ntlokonkulu, *op.cit*

Programme does not enable it to disburse money to CSOs; it is, rather, granted funds to enhance the capacity of membership-based organisations and must presumably account for the extent to which it has done so. The use of NGOs to help transfer knowledge to CBOs is an important potential strategy. Even if donors were to rely on NGOs to disburse the funds, they would be able to monitor progress and call a halt if it was not achieved.

Whatever method is adopted, however, there is no magic recipe which can ensure donors of a trouble-free ride to effective grassroots CSO funding. Judgment will remain essential, mistakes will be made and much will depend on the ability of programme officers to listen, watch and learn. And inevitably, donors will rely overwhelmingly on local sources of knowledge: the judgment is likely to consist largely of the ability to tell the wheat from the chaff. And perhaps the most important tool in the armoury of donors who wish to rise to this challenge is precisely a recognition of the limits to their knowledge. Humility and a willingness to observe and to learn from experience may be a surer guide than formulae.

Given the risks entailed, is it wise to urge a renewed and enhanced donor stress on CSOs in general (one which, according to one source is already happening as donors recognise the limits of a reliance on government alone⁷⁸) and on grassroots CSOs in particular? Since the capacity to harm is great, that to do good untested, would it not be preferable to leave well alone and remain in the relatively safe world of administrative systems and government delivery techniques? This study has tried to show that South Africa democracy will not grow unless citizens, in much greater depth and breadth than at present, combine to hold government to account and attempt to ensure that it responds to their concerns - within rules which extend to others the same right. COSATU has shown the potential of CSOs to play this role, even as it illustrates how much ground still remains to be traversed. The other studies of membership-based CSOs tell a similar story of a potential yet to be realised. And, while some of the large CSOs studied here are clearly important vehicles of citizen action, there may still be important elements in South Africa of a trend observed elsewhere in Africa - that the CSOs donors funds are not those which citizens, in the main, join.⁷⁹ Democratisation will thus remain fragile and incomplete as long as civil society continues to exclude many.

In sum, extending donor support to grassroots CSOs is an essential element in any democratisation strategy. The risks of acting are great - those of failing to act far greater.

⁷⁸ Interview, Kraak

⁷⁹ Marina Ottaway 'Social Movements, Professionalization of reform, and Democracy in Africa' in Ottaway and Carothers, op. cit., pp. 77-104