



GLOBAL BUREAU
CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY

**CIVIL SOCIETY:
A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

by

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

The following civil society conceptual framework was undertaken at the request of the Center for Democracy and Governance (G/DG) as a first step in the design of an overall civil society support project. In this regard, it both stands alone as a discrete product, and complements other deliverables produced by Thunder and Associates under its contract with G/DG for the design of this component of the Center's larger democracy and governance program. It thus represents the design team's best thinking after four months of inquiry, and draws on findings and analysis gained through parallel design efforts,¹ including: (i) a review of the relevant literature; (ii) interviews with concerned academics and individuals from U.S. foundations, policy institutes and NGOs; (iii) the administration of a civil society questionnaire to 24 USAID Missions; and, (iv) field visits made to some ten countries in Africa, Asia, NIS and the Near East.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. First, it provides G/DG with the principal **analytic** issues confronting the design of a civil society support project as well as "the state-of-art" or theoretical thinking on civil society as it has evolved to date. And secondly, it details a set of **operational** recommendations designed to assist USAID policy makers at all levels to make investment decisions in a strategic manner based on a limited number of objectives that are consistent with the both civil society state-of-the-art and USAID manageable interests. Section A of this paper discusses support for civil society within the context of a sustainable development strategy and its particular relevance for USAID Missions in the design and execution of their country programs. Section B briefly provides the larger role and several functions which civil society might be expected to undertake in the promotion of democracy and improved governance. Section C proposes a means to "operationalize" this broad concept for the purpose of identifying the subset of civil society actors which are directly engaged in democratic development and which would be a primary focus of donor support. Finally, in Section D, the issue of "sequencing" is reviewed for the purpose of equating a set of possible support interventions for civil society to the stage of a country's political development.

A. Sustainable Development Parameters and Strategic Choices

USAID Missions have critical choices to make concerning how they translate the goals of the Agency's "sustainable development" strategy into concrete country programs. Choosing the set of strategic objectives (Sos) which define USAID programs is not based solely on desirable outcomes, but rather on outcomes which are achievable as well as desirable. Individual country program strategies are formulated through the interaction of three related parameters: (i) the Agency's sustainable development strategy and relevant "implementation guidelines" which includes the principle of "managing for results"; (ii) the unique set of historical and cultural characteristics which define a country's social, economic and political life at a given point in time; and (iii) an individual Mission's own comparative advantage gained through years, if not decades, of development practice and experience in a particular country setting. In addition to these

¹ Other reports and studies undertaken as part of the civil society design and available from G/DG which complement this framework paper are: 1) "Civil Society's Theoretical Development, Contemporary Conceptualization, and Institutional Implications: A Literature Review." 2) findings and analysis from an assessment of USAID Mission views on civil society; and, 3) Trip reports, including findings and analysis, from visits made to Asia, Africa and the Near-East.

general parameters, a number of Missions included the anticipated life of country program and level of funding certainly affect programmatic decisions and, perhaps, more so today than ever before.

One of the most important strategic choices that Missions must make is how the promotion of democratic development contributes to the sustainable development objectives of their country programs. Whether a Mission elevates democracy and governance to the level of a strategic objective, treats it as a target of opportunity, or views it as a cross-cutting theme with relevance to its entire program portfolio, the assumption is made that a causal and positive relationship exists between democracy and sustainable development; and that specific interventions can be undertaken that will lead to predictable outcomes.

Development practitioners are both problem solvers and results oriented. Making the promotion of democracy relevant to USAID field missions means being able to show that, beyond being a desirable end in itself, democratic development can contribute to resolving an array of problems that constrain the implementation of their country programs. As noted in more detail below, the principal problems constraining the achievement of sustainable development faced by most countries with whom USAID works are governance problems, and are likely to be resolved only through a range of difficult governance reforms. Such reforms respond to problems of a systemic nature and which, therefore, entail changes in macro-level political institutions and processes; and at the sectoral level where more operational constraints inhibit sustained economic growth, public service delivery and the management of a country's natural resources. It is to both types of governance problems that Missions must address themselves, and specifically, to determine how best to encourage and achieve the corresponding reform(s) which facilitate and enhance successful program implementation.

It is assumed that broadening participation in both the political process and public governance functions to include non-state actors will strengthen a country's democratic values and improve its capacity for rendering quality governance; and increase the likelihood that necessary reforms are undertaken and sustained. Hence, one way of looking at civil society is in terms of its "public" role, and particularly the degree to which it is involved in national and local level problem solving, including policy making and governance reform. This emerging paradigm which assumes that civil society contributes to the construction and maintenance of a system of democratic governance and which, in turn, promotes sustainable development is best justified within this problem solving context. It also assumes that civil society undertakes this role along-side the state ... not by replacing it. When designing their programs, USAID Missions should be able to look at both sides of the democratic governance equation, i.e., state and civil society, in order to see where assistance can be best targeted to advance an identified reform agenda. Although this framework paper concerns itself with the support of civil society, the promotion of a system of democratic governance links state - society relations intimately, and thus leads our discussions to consider state institutions insofar as they define and effect civil society's role and functions.

B. Civil Society's Role in Promoting Democracy and Improved Governance

This section sets forth the principal role and major functions that civil society might be expected to undertake in promoting democracy and effective governance irrespective of the political stage in which a country finds itself at a given point in time. As noted previously, the issues of staging and the sequencing of interventions are discussed in Section D, below.

Whether democratic transitions over the past decade have been the result of enlightened authoritarian leadership, the impulse by ordinary people for democratic freedoms, or protracted negotiations between state and non-state elites, recent experience indicates that the key determinate of successful consolidations has been the ability of democratically-elected governments to provide good or effective governance. The shift from transition to consolidation stages thus reflects the importance placed on government's capacity to maintain social peace, guarantee law and order, promote directly, or create the conditions necessary for economic growth, and ensure a minimum social safety-net ... all major governance functions. Recent literature and experience, however, raise the point that effective and sustained governance is more likely occur when conditioned by democratic principles (e.g., increasing political participation and accountability through the holding of free and fair elections and limiting human rights abuses) which constrain government's exercise of authority in national decision making while increasing that of society. Thus, democracy becomes not simply an end in the process of political development, but the means by which society organizes itself to ensure effective governance.

This convergence of democratic values and good governance -- increasingly referred to as *democratic governance* -- posits a shared responsibility for society in national governance matters including both policy making and the execution of public governance functions. If governance can be considered as the way in which society organizes itself to manage public affairs, then democratic governance can be considered as a particular form governance to which democratic principles such as broad-based political participation, periodic elections and protection of human rights are applied. In this regard, democratic governance takes place not only within the state but in a narrower range of institutions and organizations that are distinct from the larger realm of associational life that comprises society and which we call civil society. Civil society's principal role in the transition to and consolidation of democratic governance systems has thus been to increase -- often through confrontation with the state -- the public space in which governance takes place to encompass previously excluded non-state actors. The literature, including CDIE's recent study on civil society which proposes development strategies incorporating civil society participation, identifies a number of major functions that civil society undertakes in the promotion of democratic governance. This framework paper selects four functions as particularly important:

- i) limiting the state's exercise of discretionary authority, especially its potential abuse of power which not only threatens democracy, but individual rights and associational autonomy as well;
- (ii) broadening societal participation in the public realm where policy making takes place, particularly over decisions related to governance reform and the allocation of public resources;

- (iii) increasing the role of non-state actors in the performance of public governance functions, including the right of primary level self-governing associations to manage local resources and deliver public services; and,
- (iv) contributing to the development of a democratic (civic) culture by offering more opportunities for participation in national political life than are available from either state institutions or political parties alone.

The concept which embraces these four broad functions of civil society is that of *civic action*. The first two functions are essentially based on civil society's capacity to demand democratic governance from the state, including participation in policy decisions affecting the public good. In practical terms, these functions involve civil society's capacity for oversight of state institutions (a "watchdog" function) on the one hand, and an ability to independently formulate, analyze and advocate for public policies favorable to constituent groups in society on the other. The latter two functions relate to civil society's capacity to supply or render democratic governance from the institutions and organizations which compose it. The following discussion provides a conceptual understanding of civil society's relationship to the state and the factors which condition its capacity for undertaking these demand and supply civic action functions.

1. The Open Public Realm: The Demand for Democratic Governance

Civic action demand functions are undertaken in the *public realm* which can be conceived of as the space created when state and society intersect in their respective exercise of political power. The degree to which the public realm is open to civil society participation depends on the nature of the political system in operation. The more democratic the system, the more open it will be to such participation; and conversely, the more authoritarian the system, the less opportunity civil society will have to participate in public policy making and/or to monitor and limit the state's discretionary exercise of authority. Thus, the global wave of recent democratic transitions has, to a large extent, been about opening the public realm to non-state or civil society participation in political life; or, put differently, reversing past asymmetries in state - society power relations. In fact, given the long history of executive branch domination of the state itself, the transition to and the consolidation of democracy, has also meant increasing the power of the legislative and judicial branches relative to the executive, as well as local or subnational governments relative to the central state.

While the public realm is a useful analytic concept for assessing relative power relations within the state, and between it and civil society, as a concept it is not amenable to reform efforts designed to increase civil society's access to and influence over political power, and thus its capacity to demand democratic governance from the state. What are amenable to reform efforts, both of a political and governance nature, and which thus brings us to a more practical or operational level, are the institutions and organizations which inhabit the public realm or, at least, are trying to gain access to it. While the nature of these institutional actors is discussed in more detail below, suffice it to note here that from within civil society, it is a far narrower range of organizations which are actually able to engage in civic action, and which thus become the focus of a donor support strategy.

2. Arenas of Public Governance: The Supply of Democratic Governance

If, as noted above, governance is the way in which a society organizes itself to manage the public's business, including the allocation and management of public resources, then inherent to the notion of democratic governance is the right of civil society to participate in the performance of governance functions as well as public policy making. Whereas the public realm is the locus of policy making, including decisions related to governance reform, it is in what we term here the *arenas of public governance* that the execution of governance reforms and the performance of public governance functions takes place. Under a system of democratic governance then, the performance of these governance functions are undertaken in arenas of public governance, whether **state publics**, **non-state publics** (civil society), or both. The supply of democratic governance by civil society not only includes its **right** to perform public governance functions, but the **obligation** to do so through democratic means. In this regard, it is held to the same standards of democratic practice and good governance as are state publics.

The history of the modern nation-state has, to a large extent, been one in which the performance of public governance functions -- just as in the realm of public policy making -- was the virtual monopoly of state publics. If there has been an exception to this rule, it has been among informal, local level, self-governing associations that have traditionally operated outside the purview of the central state. The advent of democracy on a global scale has meant that a range of civil society actors beyond those at the local and informal level now have a legitimate role to play in the performance of public governance functions. Those civil society actors undertaking a "supply-side" function in the arena of societal governance will be discussed in greater detail below. It can be noted here, however, that they differ in both in terms of their structure and mission from those actors "demanding" democratic governance in the open public realm.

What is of interest at this point is to determine which of the many non-state actors that compose civil society undertake civic action in both its supply and demand-side functions, and whether some are more **susceptible** to donor assistance than others.

C. From Civil Society to Civic Society: Operationalizing a Program of Support

In deciding which of the many actors in civil society to support in a democracy and governance program, USAID Missions will need to establish a minimum set of criteria to guide them in making reasoned choices about good organizational investments. Such support will ultimately be based on country specific needs as defined in individual Mission program strategies. As noted above, identifying the governance problems which constrain achievement of strategic objectives at both the systemic and sectoral levels can be considered a primary basis for making these investment choices. At issue is whether to target those civil society actors that operate in the public realm and demand democratic governance from the state; or those that supply it through the performance of public governance functions in the arena of societal governance. Or whether the issue should even be put in either/or terms, rather making such determinations based on where a country is located along the continuum of political development at a given point in time. In order to answer these practical or operational concerns, which are of particular importance for USAID policy makers, the "conceptual" underpinnings of civil society will first be examined as a

means to identify a number of fundamental principles necessary to define the operational parameters of a civil society support program.

1. **Society: The Origin and Legitimater of All Associational Life**

Society, the collective of individuals bound by shared history and culture, is the origin of all associational life. It is an inclusive concept subsuming under its timeless umbrella all forms of association from the basic units of family and clan to the complex web of aggregated interests that are embodied in the nation state. Society represents associational forms which can be either voluntary (e.g., a sports club or trade union) or compulsory and involuntary (e.g., the family or military). It is from society that political, social and economic domains originate and are organized. When societies are organized through consensus or majority rule, the result is likely to include a political system marked by elected, representative government and an autonomous and voluntary civic realm equally involved in governance matters. Experience likewise indicates that market economies will emerge when originating from a voluntarily organized society.

Conversely, when society is organized through the force of one societal grouping, authoritarian rule will prevail, with a centralized state penetrating both the economy and society and harnessing them to its own defined needs. To the extent that voluntary associational life or civil society exists in such circumstances, it is either structured along corporatist lines (e.g., youth, business, labor) to the central state, or functions entirely outside of its purview in small, disaggregated and informal groups. The legitimacy of the state can thus be said to have its roots in society which can either cede a measure of its autonomy to the state through voluntary consent, or withhold it, thus denying it any sense of legal or moral standing.

It is from society, therefore, that state, market and civil society originate and form into distinctive domains of associational activity. In addition, it is important to note that a number of authors distinguish a fourth societal domain, **political society**, which includes political parties and the institution of elections and the electoral process. It differs from civil society in that its primary organizing principle is that of contesting for control over the state institutions, while civil society seeks to influence state policy making from without. One can view the market as the domain in which individual firms and consumers interact to determine the allocation of resources and their exchange. It is distinct from both political and civil society up to the point where they organize to influence public policy or perform public functions. Chambers of commerce and consumer associations are good examples of market forces that express their interests in the public realm as members of civil society. Political parties which are formed by and for business interests to contest for control of the state would be considered members of political society. The importance of distinguishing these societal domains is to make clear the associational forms that belong to and reside in civil society.

2. **Civil Society: The Realm of Voluntary Association**

Civil society is a concept like that of the state and market to which it is juxtaposed. Like other theoretical constructs (e.g., democracy, sustainable development), it has generated considerable debate since its introduction into political discourse some 200 years ago. There are probably as many definitions of this concept as there are those that have written about it. The need for such a

definition is important as a means to distinguish this associational domain from the larger society from which it springs as well as from the other societal domains discussed above. The following discussion provides a number of characteristics which make these distinctions and includes a definition -- proposed here for wider consideration -- that incorporates these characteristics.

To the recognized parameters of civil society -- **the realm of associational life or social interaction that resides between the household and the state** -- recent writers on the subject have added: (i) a normative dimension based on the notion of shared civic or community values which promote tolerance, inclusion, trust, reciprocity and public service; (ii) a network or multi-stranded web of public communications capable of disseminating these civic norms and which permit citizens a means for public discourse concerning the way they want to organize themselves for political and governance purposes; (iii) structures of voluntary association or the "self-generating" nature of people coming together in common purpose; (iv) a significant degree of autonomy or independence (from the state); and (v) a minimal level of organizational structure. For the purposes of this framework paper, we employ a definition of civil society that embodies most of these features as follows:

The realm of associational life between the household and the state, which is manifest in shared civic norms, intermediary structures of voluntary association, is autonomous from the state and market, and provides networks of public communications.²

As definitions are exclusionary by nature, this particular one provides a means to assess the relationship of a wide range of associational forms to civil society. Three important democratic institutions are singled out in particular which are considered to reside in "society" but not necessarily in civil society.

- Civil society is considered to occupy the intermediary sphere between the state and market economy (a "third" sector) and is thus considered to be non-profit as well as private. While this excludes individual firms in the for-profit, private sector, it certainly includes the organizations which represent capital (e.g., chambers of commerce), labor (e.g., trade unions) and a wide range of voluntary associations representing consumers and professionals.
- There is significant agreement that while political parties -- referred to as political society along with the electoral process -- reside within society, they do not form part of civil society because their essential organizing principle is to win and exercise state power rather than to influence it from without.
- The private media, as distinguished from both public and associational, is normally considered part of civil society to the extent that it serves as an independent "network of

² This definition is modified from that developed by Michael Bratton for use in "An Assessment of USAID's Capacity for Rapid Response in Support of Civil Society's," in Fox, Bratton, et. al., Associates in Rural Development and Management Systems International, January 1993.

public communications," as a means for "limiting the state's abuse of power," and "broadening society's participation in national governance matters.

In summary, the definition provided here contains both structural and normative dimensions which translated into discernable characteristics can be best termed voluntary, autonomous, with elements of civic mindedness. These fundamental characteristics lay basis for identifying a narrower subset of civil society which engage in civic action and thus merit particular attention for a democracy and governance strategy.

3. Civic Society: Engaging the State in Public Realm and Governance Arena

A growing consensus is emerging concerning the features of those civil society actors which engage in the supply and demand civic functions that promote democratic governance. Coupled with the civic action functions presented in Section B above, are the normative and structural attributes which were isolated in the definition of civil society itself. Taken together, these three sets of characteristics define the subset of civil society -- what we term here collectively as civic society and individually as civic organizations -- that operate in what were termed above the open public realm and arena of societal governance. These three sets of attributes thus provide a bridge from the abstract concept of civil society to the programmatic level of real world actors that promote democratic governance and are susceptible to donor support. For the purposes of this framework paper the following provides a working definition of civic society:

The set of intermediary associations that link ordinary citizens with state institutions in the public realm where governance decision making takes place; and the arena of societal governance where non-state actors perform public governance functions.

The focus then is on those civil society actors which either engage the state in the public realm over issues of governance decision making; or actually execute public policy and undertake public governance functions. In this regard, **governance reform³ aims to modify the patterns of interaction, and thus behavior, between the state and civil society** leading to improved democratic governance. The nature of interaction between the state and civil society which exists today ranges from confrontational -- in countries where the state has not permitted civil society political space in the public realm -- to collaborative and shared decision making and governance performance. As a general goal, USAID programs would: (i) aim to expand civic society's space in the public realm in order to increase its capacity for participation in systemic and sectoral policy making including governance reforms; and (ii) encourage a greater role for non-state actors in the performance of public governance functions from service deliver to **implementing policy**

³ This framework paper draws significantly from the "Institutional Analysis and Design" analytic framework (developed with considerable USAID support) which views governance reform in terms of limiting state governance through the application of six democratic "disciplines," i.e., constitutionalism, electoral systems, due deliberation (legislative systems), the rule of law, the open public realm, and decentralization/subsidiarity.

change. There are two further points which arise from this narrower definition of civic society which are discussed below.

First, while our definition targets civic organizations, i.e., civil society organizations undertaking civic action functions (civic society), it is important to note that we are not only concerned with civic organizations that manifestly undertake civic action through their immediate ability to engage the state, but equally so, those with potential but, who for a number of reasons (e.g., reside and work at the local grassroots level, lack institutional capacity, etc), do not undertake such functions at a given moment in time. We will return to this point shortly.

Secondly, it is necessary to add several defining attributes to this narrower universe of civic organizations as an additional and final means to assist USAIDs in selecting reform-oriented partner organizations for support. Again, returning to the conceptual underpinnings of civil society theory, the following criteria are proposed as attributes identifying civic (organizations) society:

- the notion of voluntary association or the "self-generating" nature of people coming together in common purpose to advance shared interests or address collective needs;
- a significant degree of organizational autonomy or independence (from the state and market);
- at least a minimal level of organizational structure and capacity which from a programmatic perspective might include legal recognition from the state in order to permit *inter-alia* the right to receive donor assistance;
- primarily non-profit making in the sense that their principal organizing principal is to advance the interests of their members who may themselves be profit making; and,
- a shared commitment to democratic practice and values which at a minimum include tolerance for dissenting points of view (pluralism) and member or client participation in their own internal governance decision making.

These attributes-cum-criteria of civic organizations should not be considered as absolutes, but rather as guide-posts used by USAID missions when evaluating whether a given organization can truly contribute to an identified reform agenda or participate more fully in the performance of public governance functions. A point to keep in mind in this regard, is that there may in fact be situations in certain countries, or countries at a specific point in time, where there are few, if any, organizations which meet these criteria. This may be indicative of the need to: (i) focus on other political actors or processes (e.g., the legislature, rule of law), which are capable of advancing governance reforms including those that would open the public realm and arena of societal governance to greater non-state participation; or (ii) take a longer-term perspective that looks to foster civic organizational growth within the context of sectoral programs. In short, how flexible these criteria are applied in practice will depend on a number of country specific considerations

which only individual Missions can determine, and ultimately take responsibility for as part of their management for results program strategies.

The narrower working definition of "civic society" which we have employed here encompasses those "civic organizations" that become directly engaged in one or more civic action functions either as an organizational mandate or in response to specific situations. In this regard, two broad types of civic organization are identified: (i) specialized civic organizations that primarily operate in the public realm and who engage the state directly through civic action; and (ii) multipurpose civic organizations that primarily operate in the arena of societal governance and occasionally enter the public realm and perform a civic action function as one of many services rendered on behalf of members or clients. The following categories of civic organizations fall under these two broad categories:⁴

(i) Specialized Civic Organizations

As per CDIE's analytic framework, these organizations focus on the first two civic action functions noted above, i.e., limiting the states potential abuse of power and broadening societal participation in national governance decision making. These organizations engage the state over reforms of a primarily systemic nature that are intended to change rules, incentives and behavior in macro-political institutions. They can best be characterized as urban-based, elite-led, and which normally have little popular membership base linked to the local grassroots level. They directly engage the state at the national level and "**demand**" from it the adherence to accepted democratic practice, effective governance performance (to ensure accountability, transparency, and responsiveness), and, in general, ensure a legal, fiscal and regulatory environment that maintain an open public realm and arena of societal governance for wider civil society participation. The activities undertaken by these organizations have their greatest importance and impact throughout the transition and early consolidation stages and thus external support can be looked at as short to medium-term in nature. Specifically, it would include the following types of specialized civic organizations:

- Professional and Business Associations: representing business (capital) such as chambers of commerce and associations of manufacturers, and a wide range of independent associations representing the professions; all of whom undertake a range of advocacy functions vis-a-vis executive and legislative branches on behalf of their members, many of which deal with economic reforms as well as rule of law and open public realm reforms.
- Trade Unions: representing labor in public, private and para-public sectors and including confederations and individual member unions all undertaking advocacy functions and open public realm reforms and sometimes economic reforms.

⁴ This typology builds on work previously undertaken by USAID and the Inter-American Foundation, itself a reflection of research undertaken by a number of prominent NGO practitioners and thinkers. It should not be taken as a rigid model, but rather an analytic framework which will be validated or modified through empirical evidence gained through the Team's field visits and review of a growing body of studies and assessments on the NGO sector and civil society.

- Pro-Democracy Organizations: true "civic" or public service organizations including human and civil rights monitoring and advocacy groups, conflict mediation, election monitoring and civic education organizations which primarily focus on limiting the states abuse of power and promoting broadened political participation; in general concerned with systemic reforms related to the open public realm, constitutionalism and the rule of law.
- Policy Institutes and Think-tanks: Mainly non-profit, but should not rule out support to for-profits; or public universities which demonstrate a significant degree of autonomy from state influence; which can undertake independent policy formulation and (institutional) analysis, can serve as neutral fora bringing together a wide variety of public, private and voluntary sector actors to discuss a range of issues, and perhaps conflict resolution functions.
- The Independent Media: although private sector in terms of the basic organizing principles, the media is normally considered part of civil society to the extent that it serves as an independent "network of public communications," as a means for "limiting the state's exercise of authority" (including monitoring the state's governance performance), and "broadening society's participation in national governance matters."

(ii) Multipurpose Civic Organizations

Targeting multipurpose civic origins as part of a democratization strategy has its origins in the development participation literature of the 1970s, and is, to a large extent, a field-based, practitioners view (although with significant conceptual backing within the Agency) which looks at democracy and governance as principles and processes which contribute to their programs of sustainable development ... rather than to democracy building per se. The civic action functions undertaken by this set of civic organizations include the promotion democratic practice and values and the performance of public governance functions or the **supply** of democratic governance. Thus in terms of program strategy, support would best be provided within the context of addressing sectoral governance problems. This strategy is one which starts with a view from the bottom up, which is longer-term in perspective, and focusses on local self-governing associations and the developmental NGOs that work with and sometimes represent them. Such an approach would be allied with strategies which support decentralization and local or municipal governance. These civic action functions correspond to the last two noted above, i.e., promoting democratic practice and values and increasing voluntary association self-governance capacity. Support would therefore be medium to long-term in nature, implying setting in motion a process that can only be achieved in a generational timeframe.

- Ascriptive-based or Affinity groupings: Particularly "apex" organizations which regroup on a national or subnational basis lower level associations of "born-to" or "primordial" groups such as gender, ethnic, age-grade, and regional or home-town associations; religious organizations would figure prominently in this group.
- Developmental NGOs: which undertake an intermediary role working with and representing local grassroots associations to state institutions at both national and

decentralized levels of administration. Often have their own reform agendas based on sector of expertise.

- A range of support organizations: including NGO consortia and sectoral networks, and specialized training and technical assistance organizations which provide a range of service to other multipurpose organizations including advocacy and representation vis-a-vis government and donors.
- Federations and Unions: of lower level self-governing associations including natural resource users (e.g., irrigation and grazing associations), service providers (e.g., parent teacher associations) and economic interest groups (e.g., cooperatives and credit unions), all of whom are able to provide ordinary citizens with a voice in national political life through their participation in the open public realm.

(iii) Primary Level Associations

These include both primary level self-governing associations (e.g., natural resource users, service providers, and economic interest groups) and primordial ascriptive-based associations (e.g., kinship, lineage, age-grade and gender groups) in both rural and urban settings. While such organizations are considered the building blocks of development and democracy, they are unlikely to engage the state directly, although their function as self-governing associations is an important civic function and should be encouraged, however, indirectly.

It should be apparent that the functions undertaken by both specialized and multipurpose civic organizations are neither mutually exclusive nor uniformly applicable at all stages of transition and consolidation. In fact, in a coherent and comprehensive democracy and governance program both types of organizations would be targeted by conceiving of a package of short, medium and long-term interventions (sequencing) that traverse the political stages continuum. It is for this reason that we mentioned earlier that in the initial stages of formulating a democratization strategy it is necessary to remember that multipurpose civic organizations that have potential for eventual participation in the reform process (mainly, but not exclusively during consolidation), are ultimately as important as those which have an immediate or manifest capacity for participation (primarily during the transition and early consolidation phases). This issue is discussed in more detail in the following section.

D. From Transition to Consolidation: Sequencing Support for Civic Society

Basing a strategy of support to emerging civil societies on where a country falls along the continuum of political development as described above would be to grossly oversimplify a complex and dynamic process with little empirical evidence to back it up. These stages do not necessarily follow either a linear sequence of events, or one that is uniform across regions let alone individual countries. Other conditions such as a country's level of economic growth, the existence and size of a middle class, the spread of literacy and education, and the homogeneity of the population are all variables which have contributed to the pace and nature of democratic transitions and consolidation in countries throughout the world, and which make prescription

difficult, if not impossible. This said, we can at least attempt to describe what conditions and the corresponding set of interventions to achieve them, are consistent with democratic development. The following discussion provides some preliminary thoughts on this subject.

I. Sequencing and Political Staging

This section briefly explores the notion of "sequencing," or the linking of a set of support interventions for civil society to the stage of political development in which a country finds itself at a given point in time. The literature, in this regard, identifies three distinct stages of political development which are seen to be located along a continuum, the latter stage of which is sometimes referred to as the process of democratization. The three stages, i.e., pre-transition, transition, and consolidation, are summarized below.⁵

The Pre-transition Stage: Often viewed as the consolidation of authoritarian (or totalitarian) rule, in which the regime in power is characterized by highly centralized and hierarchical patterns of authority, normally centered around a personalistic leader or self-defined groups based on race, ethnicity, religion, or ideology. Other than a single ruling party or party-state machine, no other political party or elections (political society) are permitted. Political opposition and free discourse have essentially gone underground. The rule of law, if it exists at all, is practiced in the breach, and is thus arbitrary and capricious offering little or no predictability to individuals or groups in social, economic or political relations. Fundamental human and civil rights (e.g., habeas corpus, freedoms of speech, assembly and association) both at the individual and group levels, do not normally exist. It is hard to conceive of civil society existing under such conditions because the minimum requirement -- the right of voluntary association -- is proscribed either by law or in practice. What we associate with civil society actors elsewhere, (e.g., trade unions, cooperatives, youth and women's groups) are little more than corporatist creations of the state designed to suppress citizen participation rather than permit its expression.

The Transition Stage: Is literally defined as the interval between one regime type and another. This is a period marked by a great deal of uncertainty in which the "rules of the political game" are undefined and must be reworked, often in a relatively short period of time and, in certain circumstances, under crisis circumstances. The "deals" (rules) that are worked out during the transition phase not only affect who will participate in the immediate shaping of the new regime, but will ultimately determine the "winners and losers" under the new regime. Democracy is only one of several possible transition outcomes. There are at least two phases that compose a transition and which serve as markers for both its starting and finishing points.

i) **Political Liberalization:** The sign that a transition period has begun is when an authoritarian regime begins to modify its own rules in the direction of providing more secure guarantees of individual and collective rights, including the right of collective dissent, freedom from censorship, and voluntary association. Whether called "perestroika" or "l'ouverture,"

⁵ Please note that this discussion and the descriptions provided are likely to be biased by the particular (limited) regional experience of the design team. It should, therefore, be significantly modified as a result of field visits and document review later in the design process.

political liberalization is still the reform of an authoritarian system and not the construction of a democratic regime; and is thus based on a precarious dependence of state power rather than the rule of law. Civil society, to the extent that it exists at this stage, is characterized to a large extent by an undefined NGO sector operating quietly in the arena of societal governance involved in some aspect of humanitarian assistance or service delivery.

In a number of well-known cases, it has been dominated by loose social movements that manifest an ill-defined political agenda, where social cohesion is based on the common repugnance of the authoritarian regime in power, and the major goal is its ouster. With relaxed rules pertaining to the right of association, new groups have begun to emerge, populating the social landscape and participating in the previously closed public realm. In the forefront of these pro-democracy movements are leaders coming from the churches, previous corporatist entities such as trade unions and women's leagues, professional and business associations, the universities and wide array of popular groups from market women to taxi drivers; conspicuously absent, in most cases, are representatives from the rural peasantry.

(ii) The Democratic Transition: The critical point in the transitions comes when the incumbent regime concedes that the rules of political competition can be changed to permit the formation of independent political parties with the promise of eventual multiparty elections. While a great deal of attention has been given to dramatic power transfers as exemplified by the Philippines and the several sovereign National Conferences that have occurred in Francophone Africa, the great majority of democratic transitions have been accomplished through negotiation with the incumbent regime and/or managed by it. From this point in the transition, political parties and their contestation for political power and control of the new regime become the dominant focus. At the same time, civil society's role shifts from that of driving force of pro-democracy initiatives to a more neutral realm of non-partisan actors promoting actions that contribute to enlightening the newly enfranchised electorate of its rights and ensuring free and fair elections. Whereas a trickle of newly created organizations began emerging during "the opening," the on-set of the democratic transition witnesses a flood of voluntary associational life.

The Consolidation Stage: In a very technical sense, the end of the transition stage and beginning of democratic consolidation are both marked by the successful holding of multiparty elections and the installation of a democratically elected government. While we can thus identify the starting point of consolidation, which is likely to have several internal phases, there is no recognized end point. What "rules" the consolidation stage is the principle of "irreversibility," or the ability of new democracies to incrementally overcome threats to regime reversal. These threats come less from anti-democratic forces than from a government's inability to solve such governance problems as unemployment, social injustice, crime, or to make difficult market-oriented reforms. Successful consolidations are a process of institutionalizing democratic processes, values and institutions, thus making democracy so broadly "legitimate" that ordinary citizens are willing to defend it against internal attack.

In the early stages of the consolidation, civil society often undergoes a degree of deflation as the tremendous energies that were expended during transition give way to the realities of household economic survival. Equally important, significant differences (e.g., class, ethnicity, ideology)

which naturally existed among and between individuals and organizations but were subordinated to achieve a common purpose during the transition, have tended to reassert themselves following regime change and lead to civil society's fragmentation. While the institutional focus of support during early consolidation has tended to be on state institutions, there is probably no greater long-term challenge in the post-transition period than the reconstruction of a strong civil society capable of participating with government in the public realm of national and local level decision making.

2. Strategies for the Support of Civic Society

The following discussion provides some very general recommendations related to the sequencing of program support for civic society at each of the political stages discussed above. Experience gained from field visits made during the design stage of the civil society program component indicates that Missions in country's with weak civil societies and democratic practice tend to develop programs which are **tactical** in nature, looking at short-term measures that do not directly confront host country governments through reforms at the macro-political level. Where our foreign policy objectives are not necessarily tied to a concern with unsettling our partner governments, and rather encourage democratic development irrespective of the bi-lateral consequences, Missions have tended to be much more **strategic** in the development of their civil society support programs. Specific program support options are presented below.

Pre-transition: Happily, the number of pre-transition (non-presence) countries are few and decreasing, with notable exceptions. Donor conditionalities tied to economic and political reforms are likely to serve as more effective incentives to convince authoritarian governments of the need to permit an open public realm that includes non-state participation in national life than direct support to civil society actors at this stage of political underdevelopment; although assistance through international NGOs to targeted organizations has, in certain circumstances, advanced the democratic agenda.

Political Liberalization: USAID works in a range of sustainable development countries that are at various stages of political transition. As a general principle, the minimum requirements for civil society's participation during political liberalization are (i) a legal, fiscal and regulatory environment which enables rather than hinders voluntary association and free speech; and (ii) a critical mass of non-state actors that are capable of demanding this enabling environment and increasing society's capacity to limit state authority while expanding its own. Interventions might include support to human and legal rights organizations to push for legislation that reforms associational laws including those dealing with NGO registration, labor union rights, etc. In general, actions which increase both the number and capacity of civic organizations that can directly engage the state and bring about democratic reform are to be encouraged. A relatively flexible and broad program of grant and technical support which seeks to seed the terrain of civil society would be useful. Because of the centralized nature of most authoritarian regimes, a focus on fostering civic organization growth at the national level would appear appropriate.

The Democratic Transition: The two major activities of the democratic transition are (i) agreeing on the new political rules of the game which may include the drafting of a new

constitution, and (ii) the holding of free and fair elections. The importance of ensuring as wide a cross-section of societal interest representation as possible in the new rule formation is critical to both the holding of elections and the subsequent taking of power by the new regime. Support to civic organizations viewed as politically neutral in such areas as mediation and conflict resolution, and ensuring that previously marginalized groups find representation at the table where the new rules are made, would appear to offer both short-term and long-term benefits. Technical assistance, training and grant support to non-partisan civic organizations that undertake what are likely to be a whole new set of democratic functions ranging from voter education to poll watching and election monitoring are obvious requirements of this phase.

In both these transition phases, supporting the emergence of an independent media is critically important in both providing a medium for public communications and in starting the process of limiting state authority and potential abuses.

Consolidation: The principal focus of a civil society support project during both transition phases is likely to be on those civic organizations and independent media outlets which can perform the specialized functions outlined above which directly confront and limit central state authority. While these civic society actors will venture into new areas of civic action (e.g., policy analysis, formulation, and advocacy, as well as monitoring state governance performance) in early stages of democratic consolidation and thus merit continued assistance, the locus of support should begin to shift to the growing number of less formalized voluntary associations in both rural and urban areas. Building a democratic culture that embodies civic norms, and increasing the capacity of self-governing associations to participate in decision making beyond the local level should be the emphasis from the earliest stages of consolidation. This will both reinforce and drive reforms for decentralization and municipal government while countering the dominance that specialized civic organizations gained during the transition stage in terms of setting civil society's agenda. The types of interventions that would be supported in such a strategy might include: (i) increasing the number (density) and diversity of local self-governing associations as a prerequisite to local civil society formation (reaching a critical mass of voice and choice); (ii) promoting horizontal linkages (solidarity) among similar types of local associations as a precondition to (iii) vertical integration or federating in order to permit aggregation, articulation and advocacy of local needs and aspirations beyond the local level.

At each of these three stages, assistance can be designed to promote civic action capacity. True representation and participation of ordinary citizens in limiting state abuses and increasing broad-based participation in national governance matters will only come about, however, when the right combination of an enabling environment, enlightened policies and targeted support converge and are made a priority.