

1 A Sociological Analysis of Civil Society Success in International 2 Development Project

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6

7 **Abstract**

8 This paper examines the various determinants of civil society or NGOs success in the
9 international development project. Civil society is a broader concept that consists of all the
10 social groups and social relationships in which humans are embedded, including family,
11 community, social movements, religious organizations, schools, ethnic groups, clubs,
12 professional associations, PTAs, etc. It refers to the quality of people's social life which
13 includes safety, improved healthcare, mortality, civility, respect for diversity, and so forth.
14 Several scholars have identified various determinants for civil society success, notably in
15 developing nations. These include NGOs' intermediary role; serving as a source for feed-back
16 and integration; and cooperation among competing organizations. Others attribute the
17 success to accountability; collaboration with international activist groups; diffusion of ideas
18 through rapid communication carried out and advanced by certain "rooted cosmopolitans;"
19 and availability of funds from international donors. The article examines scholars' centripetal
20 and centrifugal on the subject matter and highlights some implications. It concludes that civil
21 society contributes to the international development project through ensuring democracy by
22 mobilizing the public, creating awareness, political participation, advocacy campaigns, and
23 struggle for political rights. It finally posits that, the determinants for civil society/NGO
24 success in international development project are multidimensional, advocating for a
25 development model that recognizes the role of religious organizations as civil society actors in
26 order to have a meaningful, compatible, and sustainable development model.

27

28 **Index terms**— civil society, NGOs, international development, determinants, success, Africa.

29 **1 Introduction**

30 Proceeding from reviewing the definition of civil society, this essay identifies what scholars have considered the
31 determinants of civil society/nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) success in the project of international
32 development. It then explores how authors vary in terms of how they define "success," identifying areas
33 of agreement and Author : Department of Sociology, Boston University, Massachusetts-U.S.A. E-mail :
34 mustapha@bu.edu 1 Although, NGOs" service dimensions are numerous, an important distinction needs to
35 be made between international development and humanitarianism. While international development focuses on
36 longterm plans or sustainable projects, humanitarianism is a short-term "remedy" mainly during crisis, war, or
37 disaster. What the two projects share is responsibility/empathy to others. Important tour discussion is that
38 humanitarianism is part of international development and civil society/humanitarian NGOs equally contribute
39 through it.

40 disagreement. The essay then examines the authors" sociological explanations for civil society success. It finally
41 argues that the Western secular development models and approach fail to deliver in Africa because they contradict

4 III. DETERMINANTS OF NGO/CIVIL SOCIETY

42 the culture and reality of the people, advocating for a holistic approach that is peopleoriented, community-driven,
43 and faith-related.

44 2 II.

45 3 Definition/Operationalization of Civil Society Concept

46 Like many terms in the social sciences, civil society has many definitions 2 . The idea of civil society is the idea
47 of a part of society which has a life of its own, which is distinctly different from the state 3 , and which is largely
48 in autonomy from it. Civil society lies beyond the boundaries of the family and the clan and beyond the locality;
49 it lies short of the state (Shils, 2000). From this definition, three main components of civil society could be
50 discerned: a part of society that comprises a complex of autonomous institutions 4 ; society possessing particular
51 complex of relationships between itself and the state and a distinctive set of institutions which safeguard the
52 separation of state and civil society and maintain effective ties between them; and a widespread of refined or civil
53 manner. Persell (1997) defines civil society in terms of institutional and qualitative dimensions. Institutionally,
54 it consists of all the social groups and social relationships in which humans are embedded. This includes family,
55 community, social movements, religious organizations, schools, ethnic groups, clubs, professional associations,
56 PTAs, and so on. Qualitatively, civil society refers to the quality of people's social life which includes safety,
57 improved healthcare, mortality, civility, respect for diversity, and so forth. Civil society therefore is a broader
58 concept much more than simply the idea of social economy or the third sector since it includes formal and
59 informal social relationships and networks, the institutions in the nonprofit sector, the family, as well as trust,
60 social attitudes, tolerance, and so on.

61 An important point that Persell succinctly made from his delineation of civil society is its institutional and
62 qualitative dimensions which can be viewed as the essence of civil society. Put differently, part of what the civil
63 society concerns with is meeting a perceived need, advancing a cause, or promoting certain interests which could
64 be of the general public, particular clubs, professional bodies, interest groups, etc. Thus, ensuring improvement
65 of quality of life (what may be considered as development) could be seen as one of the functions of civil society.
66 In the same line of thought, Durning (1989) argues that real development is the process whereby individuals and
67 societies build the capacity to meet their own needs and improve the quality of their own lives. At the individual
68 level, it means self-respect that will enhance personal dignity and subsequently economic progress. Socially, it
69 implies developing the institutions that can promote public good. Physically, it involves finding solutions to
70 the basic necessities of life such as nutrition, access to health care, clean water, shelter and clothing. What are
71 the determinants of NGO success? Mencher (2003) argues that determining success of NGOs in international
72 development project is difficult due to variations in NGOs' missions, their methods of operation, size, location,
73 organizational pattern, resources including sources, funders' interest and monitoring style, target population,
74 and so on. As a result, there is no overarching theory that explains success. Different scholars have offered
75 various explanations for what they consider as the determinants of NGO/civil society success. The next section
76 reviews and contrasts some of these views with regards to the project of international development.

77 4 III. Determinants of NGO/Civil Society

78 Success in the Project of International Development Development as a purposeful project of intervention toward
79 improving the lives of people around the world gained popularity after World War II. The project was supported
80 by a liberal philosophy of markets that called for increased financial aid to poorer nations to bolster their
81 economic migration from premodern to development (Bonsu and Polsa (2011). The NGO 5 as a sector plays a
82 very important role in the project of international development 6 . Smith (1996) 5 Nongovernmental organizations
83 (NGOs) and civil society organizations among other associations are called the nonprofit sector as the collective
84 name used to describe institutions and organizations in American society that are neither government nor business
85 (Source 2012). As a result, for the purpose of this essay, NGO and civil society will be used interchangeably.
86 6 I am using international development project to mean the development projects that started after World
87 War II, which focus on fighting poverty and alleviating suffering while improving the quality of lives in former
88 colonized countries. posits that in the past three decades the sector has significantly expanded its involvement
89 in international development. Essentially, he argues, NGOs, especially in developing nations at the national
90 and regional levels serve as intermediaries in channeling international assistance to the needy members of their
91 societies. Similarly, Clark (1990) examines the role of voluntary organizations in democratic regimes in Africa,
92 Asia and Latin America with focus on economic projects. His findings revealed that these NGOs have positively
93 impacted on the lives of the rural poor through enhancing skills and resources as against aiming at political
94 participation. He attributed their success to cooperation and partnership between national and regional NGOs
95 with grassroots associations that they formed in order to have a meaningful improvement on their lives.

96 Keck and Sikkink (1998) identified the various roles of civil society by examining the key role that a network of
97 activists played in ending gross violation of human rights in Argentina by the military in the late 70s. A striking
98 point is how domestic NGOs in collaboration with international ones provided crucial information on the events,
99 lobbied governments and INGOs to show concern, investigate, and effect change. This shows the success of civil
100 society and its potentials to effect change not only at the grassroots level, but equally national as well as in the
101 global politics 7 .

102 With reference to empirical studies in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, Fisher (1993) documents and shows
103 how this success story led to a significant growth of such organizations. He had acknowledged the success of NGOs
104 as alternative means of helping the poor and the oppressed in the developing states but was critical of the increase
105 in numbers of the NGOs. He therefore attributed the proliferation of the NGOs to the availability of funds from
106 international donors 8 . Between the mid-1970s and on, American, Canadian, and European NGOs received
107 increasing amounts of homegovernment subsidies, and they found ready recipients in newly created intermediary
108 NGOs in developing countries-many of which could neither have begun nor continued without foreign assistance
109 (Fisher, 1993). Thus, the intermediary role of the NGOs was vital, yet the resources including funds, human,
110 technical, ideas, etc. that the affluent countries sent were the determinants for success.

111 Smith (2012) examines the impacts of voluntary sector in some degree to any society to include 20 2 40 ()C
112 A Sociological Analysis of Civil Society Success in International Development Project back; provides the ability
113 to liberate individuals and permits them the fullest possibilities for personal providing the society with partially
114 tested innovations, the chance to choose and institutionalize what appears most promising; countervailing
115 definition of reality and morality including ideologies and worldviews; the play (recreation) element of society;
116 and creating social integration. Also, it serves as a source of negative feedback; provides the ability to liberate
117 individuals and permits them the fullest possibilities for personal capacities and potentials; and contributes to
118 the economic system, particularly in modern industrial society 9 . Domanski (2012) shifts focus by examining
119 competitiveness of NGOs as a determinant for success. His study reveals that the contrasting alternative to
120 competition strategies is strategies of cooperation. He presents a considerably different result from the findings
121 that exist in the U.S. or U.K. where competition between nonprofits is essential in these countries. Domanski
122 argues that the nonprofit sector in the developing nations and particularly in his research area (Poland) is in its
123 embryonic stage. Thus, cooperation among "competing" NGOs determines the outcome. But perhaps this could
124 be depending on a number of factors including if the donors" criteria for receiving funds require such cooperation
125 or collaboration.

126 The civil society has succeeded in creating political space through activism, advocacy, and establishing
127 international networks and links. They do that through collaboration with like-minded local and international
128 NGOs, and sometimes appeal to international authorities. In most developing nations, especially in post-colonial
129 Africa, the civil society has been the most powerful force in pressurizing military regimes to hand over to civilians.
130 This has been the case with civilian administrations that aim at selfperpetuation (Kukah, 1999) as was evident
131 in Nigeria during the Obasanjo administration in 2007. The determinants are utilizing professional associations
132 including labor and professional unions, human rights activists, etc. to change the constitution in favor of
133 democracy, participate in voter registration, voting, and other civic engagements.

134 Similarly, Keck and Sikkink (2005) argue that NGOs, particularly advocacy networks 10 have helped and
135 sustained several changes between the late 60s and mid 90s in the Latin America. They posit that these 9
136 Nevertheless, Smith cautions that there are as many negative consequences as there are positive sides of the
137 sector in certain situations in relation to certain values. Thus, he seems neutral, depending on the society and
138 circumstances. 10 Keck and Sikkink assert that advocacy networks are at both local and international levels but
139 collaborate through information exchange. Transnational advocacy networks must be understood as political
140 spaces, in which differently situated actors negotiate-formally or informally-the social, cultural, and political
141 meanings of their joint enterprise (2005:3).

142 NGOs have built links among actors in civil societies, states, and international nongovernmental organizations
143 (INGOs) in many areas, notably human rights, environment, and woman suffrage. Thus, the civil society"s
144 success in this regard can be seen through "the boomerang pattern 11 " (Keck and Sikkink 2005:12). Tarrow
145 (2005) corroborates this view by examining the role of ordinary members of communities who gain new worldviews
146 and help in the development of their societies. He attributes the success of this to the diffusion of ideas using
147 rapid communication that result in new forms of action by the "rooted cosmopolitans" who sometimes come up
148 with new identities due to contacts with others across their borders.

149 Diaz (2012) provides a critique, arguing that despite civil society emerges to address poverty, the sector does
150 not address the needs of the poor and disadvantaged very well because many of the NGOs are run by elites, who
151 neither feel the suffering of the poor nor deliver resources to them. He however exonerates few NGOs notably
152 faith-related agencies. Accountability therefore, Diaz asserts, should be the determinant of the sector"s success.
153 Similarly, Diallo and Thuillier (2004) posit that the success of civil society in the international development
154 projects cannot best be determined by only one dimension but by multiple dimensions/parties. It should include
155 the project manager, coordinator, task manager, a supervisor, the project team, steering team, the beneficiaries,
156 and the population at large. This gives a critique of the projects since the development projects, who are mainly
157 technocrats are not the only ones to evaluate the impact of services provided. Similarly, the NGOs as project
158 partners or intermediary are not the only ones to determine projects" success.

159 5 IV.

160 6 Examining A Centripetal and Centrifugal in Defining S

161 From the above, it is evident that scholars vary on the determinants of civil society success in the international
162 development project. While some attribute the sector"s success to the intermediary role of NGOs, others focus on

163 the transfer of resources from the global north to the global south, specifically to NGOs as against governments
164 of the countries. Yet, other scholars attribute the success to cooperation and collaboration between civil
165 organizations, diffusion of resources including ideas, money, technology, empowerment of women, etc. Similarly,
166 accountability, civic engagement, and other indices have been suggested. What appears a consensus among the
167 scholars is that all believe that there is inequality at various levels: national (within developing nations) and at
168 international (global north and south) levels. It was this inequality that led to the need for the international
169 development project. All authors seem to believe that civil society gives voices to certain groups, notably the
170 underprivileged. This does not rule out other elite and recreational or interest groups. In the same line of thought,
171 Beckfield (2003) posits that global inequality has weakened INGOs and their member states from succeeding in
172 the world polity. He argues that since 1960, the rich, core, Western states and societies dominated the world
173 polity. An important question worthy to ask is "Have the international development projects that are controlled
174 by these dominating nations through various agencies been genuinely programmed to address the causes of the
175 problems, or are they providing palliative solutions?" The next section analyses how the authors agree or disagree.

176 In order to examine how the scholars agree or vary in terms of their definition of "success," let us treat
177 thematically. Socially, it is striking how the authors, despite variation in the determinants of civil society success,
178 appreciate the value for coming together as a group-based as against individual-focus to address certain issues.
179 This shows that civil society is essential to social vitality and human progress. Free association of individual
180 citizens in such organizations reinforces participatory norms, encourages cooperative interaction, and promotes
181 interpersonal trust-all of which are believed to be crucial for achieving effective solutions to problems facing the
182 wider community (Putnam 2000:171-76). But some scholars like Coleman (1988) will disagree, asserting that
183 social capital is neutral. Still others like Heying (2001) believe that decline in membership and in activities is not
184 a reliable indicator of social engagement. An example is the role of ideas using rapid communication by "rooted
185 cosmopolitans" a form of activism that has created "the darker side" of transnational relations which has created
186 "clandestine cells of militants 12 , international drug links, and traders in human beings" (Tarrow, 2005:43). It
187 is in skepticism of these kinds of "extreme voices" that Fiorina (1999) questions civic engagement, arguing it is
188 not always absolutely good or does not do harm.

189 Economically, civil society has contributed huge amounts of dollars given as aids, donations, etc. to empower
190 the poor; provided jobs for staff; and assisted women through credit and thrift societies. While some authors
191 focus on the role of ideas, others focus on faceto-face contacts. Importantly, as Clark (1990) asserts, such as
192 Boko Haram are dangerous as they pick up arms and engage in violence that claims the lives of many innocent
193 persons. The acts of these militants are undoubtedly products of "rooted cosmopolitans" with negative attendant
194 consequences on Sub-Saharan Africa and the international community.

195 most NGOs focus on supporting economic projects that have some impact on enhancing skills or resources. It
196 is evident that the civil society has succeeded in collaborating with their donors in innovative activities in areas
197 such as small scale agriculture, water development, environmental protection, basic health and family planning,
198 credit and management training, production and consumer cooperation, etc. Nevertheless, Smith cautions that
199 "The poorest of the poor (the landless, the sick, the elderly, the handicapped) usually do not directly benefit"
200 from all of these grassroots associations because "many NGOs especially those that are cooperatives or credit
201 unions require a minimum of resources and skills to participate" (1990:222). In the same line of thought, Diaz
202 (2012) insists, associations must be accountable via these dimensions: financial responsibility, good governance,
203 mission faithfulness, and effectiveness. More so, NGOs 13 must be responsible to the public, members and staff,
204 clients, donors, and government.

205 In terms of politics, civil society contributes to the international development project through ensuring
206 democracy by mobilizing the public, creating awareness, political participation, advocacy campaigns, and struggle
207 for political rights. Certainly, there are variations in determining "success" among scholars civic engagement
208 determines "democracy" or "democracy" determines civic or political participation. Put differently, is it the
209 civil society that determines democracy or vice versa? Strikingly, many scholars agree that a strong civil society
210 yields trust and trust is essential because it is the quintessence of a successful modern society. In addition, all
211 scholars agree that democracy, as against despotic regimes is more desirable as it guarantees liberty. It seems all
212 scholars agree or endorse a politically activated civil society that operates as group action as against individual
213 actionlevel. But scholars differ with regards the relationship between the state and civil society. One conception
214 imagines the civil society united against the state, and another stresses the irreducible pluralism of civil societies
215 in modern days.

216 Lastly, there seems agreement among authors that civil society plays a very important role in improving the
217 people's lives, especially the most vulnerable or marginalized members of society. Notwithstanding, there does
218 not seem to be consensus as to the particular sector that requires more emphasis-health, education, vocational
219 training, political participation, human rights, gender, or economic empowerment. 13 Smith (2010) examines
220 why NGOs proliferated so widely in Nigeria and he found that most of them, especially in the health-related
221 sector, are fake. What they actually do is follow the band wagon of donorssince the donors" focus is fighting
222 HIV/AIDS and related diseases, then the "AIDS NGOs" shift their "missions," "visions," and "focus," to the
223 directions of the donors.

224 A reflection at this point may be on the service dimensions of the NGOs 14 . The UNDP Report of 2003 posits
225 that NGOs have recorded a huge success in improving the living standards of the poor. They have increased

226 women empowerment, assisted farmers, fought diseases, and many more. What accounted for their success
227 was targeting women and involving them in support groups, establishing credit and thrift societies, emphasizing
228 empowerment, health and family planning programs, and attitudinal reorientation. This has in the long run led to
229 eroding some stereotypes that were neglecting women as actors in the implementation of meaningful development.
230 Women empowerment, fighting poverty, access to and improved healthcare are certainly some of the challenges
231 in the developing world. But how are these measured: qualitatively or quantitatively? Who measures them?
232 Using what indices or scales?

233 As Portes (1998) argues, involvement and participation in groups can have positive consequences for the
234 individual and the community as a staple notion, whose source can be dated back to the works of classical
235 sociologists like Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx. Durkheim's work on social solidarity emphasizes group life as
236 an antidote to normlessness or anomie and selfdestruction. On the other hand, Marx's distinction between an
237 atomized class-in-itself and a mobilized and effective class-for-itself shows how mobilization, civic engagement,
238 and collective action can influence change 15 . Similarly, Reid (1999) posits, NGOs strengthen democracy by
239 giving citizens a variety of opportunities to meet and talk, build civic skills, and assemble their resources for
240 joint action (1999:291). This is similar to Max Weber's (1991) Rational Action 16 which views human actions
241 or behaviors (example by joining voluntary associations) as related to cause and effect in the social realm. The
242 implication of this extends to all actors: individuals in civil society, politicians or bureaucrats representing the
243 state, the donor agencies, and the society at large.

244 7 V.

245 8 Conclusion

246 This essay began by definition of civil society, and then identified various authors' views on the determinants of
247 civil society/NGO success in the project of international development. It then examined how the authors agreed
248 or otherwise vis-à-vis defining "success." Finally, the essay attempted to critique 14 For details about various forms
249 of NGOs including service agencies and dimensions see Smith and Lipsky (2012). 15 This does not mean Karl
250 Marx believes or sees civil society in positive terms. Instead, he views civil society as the sphere where the interest
251 of the bourgeoisie is protected -civil society as the realm of inequality, plurality, and competing interests meant
252 little more than "man's exploitation by man" (Marx, [1873] (1996) On Jewish Question 16 Weber classified human
253 social action into: rational, instrumental, affectional, and traditional determinants of the success, providing some
254 sociological explanations. Generally and broadly, civil society plays many important roles including socialization,
255 public and quasi-public functions, as well as representative functions at grassroots, national, and international
256 levels. Despite challenges, the civil society in the target countries (developing nations) nevertheless, continues to
257 contribute to the project of international development. The sector has served as an intermediary between donors
258 and the target population in virtually all aspects of human life, notably health, education 17 , politics, and
259 social. There are many points of divergence among scholars on the meaning of civil society, its role in the society,
260 and what factors determine the success of the sector in the international development project and in sustainable
261 development. It can be argued that the different conceptions of civil society's definition have led to variations
262 in scholars' expectations about what its role is vis-à-vis modern polities as well as its relationship to the state.
263 Nevertheless, there seems to be agreement among scholars that there is inequality at various levels, notably in
264 the developing nations as well as at the global north and south. More so, scholars do not seem to disagree on
265 the need to assist in improving the quality of people's lives in the global south which faces many problems from
266 lack of democracy, corruption, poverty, diseases, illiteracy, human rights violations, marginalization, etc.

267 Importantly, despite disagreement about the determinants of "success," scholars believe that the governments
268 in many of these countries may not be able to deliver or "develop," thus creating a niche for the civil
269 society to perform intermediary or complementary functions. Some dilemmas notwithstanding are: What
270 kind of development do these countries need? Whose understanding of the problem? Who defines or
271 determines the development model: donor agencies or the people? Should the development project be
272 fundingdriven or community-oriented? How is the relationship between the donors and the recipients: mutual
273 or appendage/exploitative? How genuine and accountable are the NGOs that serve as intermediaries? What
274 conditions will warrant the flourish of civil society and what then will be the role of the state in these countries?

275 Certainly, as Kukah (1999) rightly asserts, Africa seeks some form of democracy, civil society and the associated
276 institutions as a result of survival-which the present political elite and the development agencies are unable to
277 deliver. It is against this background that this articleadvocates for a development model that is compatible
278 with the target societies for the international development projects. In Africa for instance, secular development
279 models usually fail partly because, they do not fit the realities of the people. Corroborating this view, Deneulin
280 and Rakodi (2001) posit, "[T]he role of religious organizations as civil society actors has to be reckoned with,

8 CONCLUSION

²⁸¹ not only in the delivery of social services but also in advocacy" (2011:8). As if invoking Deneulin and Rakodi on
²⁸² that, Clarke concludes, "Put simply, in development contexts, faith matters ??⁸" (2006:846). ^{1 2 3 4 5 6}

¹Only a few will be used here³ Although different, but not totally separate: the autonomy is far from complete. Civil society works within the framework set by laws.⁴ Such as economic, religious, political, intellectual-which are distinguishable from the family, clan, locality and the state

²Keck and Sikkink (2005) show how transnational advocacy networks influence policies by means of campaigns including at transnational levels. They examined how they contributed in campaigns such as for the abolishing of slavery and for woman suffrage, and foreshadow transnational campaigns in many areas.⁸ The U.S. government in particular was providing more funding to such societies especially where military dictators were ruling.

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⁴© 2013 Global Journals Inc. (US)A Sociological Analysis of Civil Society Success in International Development Project¹¹ Instead of the civil society directly addressing the government, appeals to international community bounces back and pressure is mounted on governments to act, react, or change certain activities.

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⁶Onuoha (2010) argues that radical groups under the banner of "Civil Society" in Nigeria including sectarian, ethnic and religious militants

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