Civil Society and Strengthening of Democracy

June 12-14, 2006; Sussex, UK

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“Never doubt that a group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world.
Indeed it is the only thing that ever did.”

- Margaret Mead
## Governance and Human Rights

### Three Key Goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Components</th>
<th>State Action</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Dignity</td>
<td>Freedom from: child labour, drudgery, hunger, public defecation</td>
<td>Strong policies, Effective laws, Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accessible justice</td>
<td>Local courts, fair processes, just compensation for rights violations, and speedy resolution</td>
<td>Rule of Law, Local Courts, Judge-population ratio, Procedural changes, Accent on rights of poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for vertical mobility</td>
<td>School education, primary healthcare, basic amenities – water</td>
<td>Resource allocation, Sensible policies, Effective delivery systems, Accountability, Decentralization</td>
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</table>
Flawed Political Process

Institutional rigidities
System of alibis
Change of players vs. rules of the game
Honesty & survival not compatible
Over-centralization

Vote ——— Public good
Taxes ——— Services
Authority ——— Accountability

Incapacity to institutionalize innovations
## Flawed Democracies - Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macro perspectives</th>
<th>Micro perspectives</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disaggregate volatility</td>
<td>Oligopoly of parties</td>
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<tr>
<td>Broadly reflective of public opinion</td>
<td>Local voting irregularities and fraud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruling parties &amp; powerful candidates are voted out</td>
<td>Only players change, no change in rules of game</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejection vote common</td>
<td>Issues and candidate merits are largely irrelevant</td>
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## Political Parties vs. Societies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Parties</th>
<th>Societies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monopoly or oligopoly</td>
<td>Free choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Represent history, memories, aspirations of millions</td>
<td>Mere organisations of convenience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek power over all people</td>
<td>Pursue members’ collective goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot be easily formed or built</td>
<td>Can be formed and dissolved at will</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People and members have no realistic alternatives</td>
<td>Members have multiple options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicles for political participation of citizens</td>
<td>Vehicles for voluntary pursuit of individual/group goals</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## Key Reforms

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Process reforms</th>
<th>Funding</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Criminalization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voting irregularities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemic reforms</td>
<td>Proportional Representation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Separation of Powers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decentralization</td>
<td>Local Governments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rule of Law</td>
<td>Judicial reforms</td>
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<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Right to information</td>
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<td>Citizens’ charters</td>
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<td>Independent crime investigation</td>
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Civil Society’s Role

• Mobilize people for reforms
  – Local
  – National

• Strengthen democratic processes

• Adversarial and collaborative
Civil Society’s Role

- Make the state do its job
- Take charge of areas un-addressed by state and market
- Assert people’s sovereignty and community control
- Build a framework for social cohesion and a sense of common fate
Role of Civil Society & Legitimacy

Three Key Issues:

- Democratic Process vs. Policy Advocacy
- Methods of Engagement
- Internal Functioning
1. Democratic Process vs. Policy Advocacy

- Policy evolution is a legitimate function of political process
- Parties are meant for interest aggregation
- CSOs involved in democracy movements should focus on process issues.
- CSOs may have views on policies, and may even lend voice. But they cannot insist on a particular policy.
- But, Constitutionalism, rule of law and democratic process are non-negotiable
## 2. Methods of Engagement

**Political Process vs. Civil Society**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Society</th>
<th>Role of Political Process</th>
<th>Role of Civil Society</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mature Democracies</td>
<td>Solution</td>
<td>Specific Advocacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flawed Democracies</td>
<td>Problem</td>
<td>Movement for Reform</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dictatorships</td>
<td>Non-existent</td>
<td>Movement for Democracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Methods of Engagement (contd.)

In societies with basic tools of democracy

- Obstructionism
- Violence
- Arousing passions
- Emotional blackmail (eg: hunger strike)
- Reasoned public debate
- People’s mobilization
- Marshalling facts
- Logical Analysis
- Negotiation and persuasion

Unacceptable

Acceptable
3. Internal Functioning

- Democratic Structure
- Participative decision making
- Non-partisan approach
- Transparent funding
- Accountability mechanisms
- Voluntary code of conduct
- Disclosure and Transparent Funding: Democracy movement may best avoid government support and foreign funding
- Negotiation and interaction with government and parties are both necessary and desirable
Approaches to Citizens’ Activism
Lok Satta’s experience

- Election Watch — Non partisan activism impact on criminalization (facilitatory + exposure)
- Candidate disclosure – Adversarial activism
- Right to information — Advocacy and mass mobilization
- Funding reform — Collaborative activism
Approaches to Citizens’ Activism
Lok Satta’s experience

- Collective informed assertion
- Wide dissemination of information
- Effective mass communication
- Strategic intervention
Future of Voluntarism

- Public service contractor (education, health care, slum resettlement etc.)
- Collaborator with state (community participation, watershed development etc.)
- Social innovators (new technologies, organizations and services)
- Social critics and policy advocates (child labour, environment etc.)
- Building civil society institutions (electoral reform, right to information, decentralization, police and judicial reform etc.)
Key Requirements

- Inspiration
- Leadership
- Legitimacy
- Funding
- Linkages
“The punishment suffered by the wise who refuse to take part in the government, is to suffer under the government of bad men.”

- Plato