



Power to the People? (Con-) Tested Civil Society in Search of Democracy

Uppsala, March 23-24, 2010

*International conference organized by the Uppsala Centre for Sustainable Development, Uppsala University
in cooperation with the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)/Team Civil Society*

Civil society has over the past decades been considered of increasing relevance in processes of democratization, development, the protection of human rights and in demands for transparency and accountability of states and governments. In these discussions, civil society is commonly described as composed by autonomous individuals freely engaging in horizontal networks to promote shared interests. However, in many - perhaps most - places in the world, people's form of engagement with others is influenced by obligations and loyalties to collectivities such as kin or ethnic groups, often in combination with a particular social status or class interest. Differences in state regimes and informal power structures also influence the way people will strive to enhance their welfare, safety and interests.

In this conference, we explore differences of civil society formation across the world. Furthermore, we look at the implications such differences have for the ways people strive to achieve political change, especially in the context of present late neoliberal era. What are the consequences for democratization? How can actors wanting to promote democratic change - as activists or through development cooperation - best form their work in these different contexts?

With key-lectures by top scholars from four continents - Lloyd Sachikonye, Nandini Sundar, Evelina Dagnino and Saad Eddin Ibrahim - prominent long-standing activists - Thierno Kane and Kumi Naidoo - and a series of participatory parallel sessions, we will have two full days of reflections and discussions.

NB! The subject asks for breaching the divide between research and practice. Thus, we welcome contributions from scholars, practitioners and activists alike.

The topical sessions to be addressed are (see attached document for session descriptions):

- *Uncivil attachments: The role of ethnic affiliations, kinship bonds and patron-client relations in contemporary popular politics*
- *Gendered participation in civil society: "New" spaces for women or a less powerful road? What kind of space and what kind of power?*
- *Contradictory interests within civil society: Open conflicts and new state-civil society relations*
- *Civil society and the demands from donors: Caught between a rock and a hard place*
- *The role of Middle East civil society in democratization*
- *African governments, civil society and democracy*
- *Religious discourses as part of civil society formation and democratization in Asia*
- *Latin American ciudadanía or citizenship - different notions of citizens and political participation*

Abstracts (summary) of your presentation of no more than 300 words should be submitted to <mailto:Heidi.Moksnes@csduppsala.uu.se>
Heidi.Moksnes@csduppsala.uu.se
Please write "Power to the People?" as the topic of your e-mail. Be sure to note which session you wish to address.

Deadline for submission of abstracts is **January 25, 2010**.

Submitters will be notified by February 10, 2010. Note that only 3-4 presentations per session will be chosen. If you prepare a written paper for your presentation, we wish to have this paper by March 15 to send to the chair and discussant of your session. The abstracts of all session presentations will be distributed to all participants, and will also be included in the ensuing volume of conference proceedings.

Deadline for conference registration (for participants not making presentations) is February 22.

Venue: Missionskyrkan, S: Olofsgatan 40, Uppsala. (Suggested **hotel**, across the street from venue: Hotel Uppsala, <<http://www.profilhotels.se>>www.profilhotels.se)

Time: March 23-24, 2010

The conference, including lunches and coffees, is **free of charge**.

This conference is organized with the support of The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation.

Most welcome!

Mia Melin and Heidi Moksnes

Coordinators of the Civil Society Project (see <http://www.csduppsala.uu.se/civsoc/>)

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March 23-24, 2010

International Conference
Missionskyrkan, S:t Olofsgatan 40, Uppsala, Sweden

Preliminary Program

Tuesday, March 23

- 9.15 **Welcome and presentation of the conference**
- 9.30 **Contested notions of civil society**
Lars Trägårdh, Prof. in History, Ersta Sköndal University College, Sweden
- CIVIL SOCIETY ACROSS THE WORLD**
- 9.50 **Africa**
Lloyd Sachikonye, Assoc. Prof. in Political Science, Institute of Development Studies, University of Zimbabwe
- 10.10 COFFEE
- 10.30 **Asia**
Nandini Sundar, Prof. of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University
- 10.50 **Latin America**
Evelina Dagnino, Prof. at the Dept. of Political Science, University of Campinas, Brazil
- 11.10 **Middle East**
Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Distinguished Visiting Professor of Islamic Studies at Drew University, New Jersey
- 11.30 **Group discussions and general discussion**
- 12.30 LUNCH

13.45 **Many voices - one choir: A UN perspective**
Thierno Kane, Director of the Civil Society Organizations Division/Bureau for Resources and Strategic Partnerships at UNDP

14.15 Group discussions and general discussion

14.45 COFFEE

15.15 **PARALLEL SESSIONS: UNDERSTANDING DIVERSE CIVIL SOCIETY**

SESSION 1: Uncivil attachments: The role of ethnic affiliations, kinship bonds and patron-client relations in contemporary popular politics

Chair: Beppe Karlsson, Dept. of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University

SESSION 2: Gendered participation in civil society: “New“ spaces for women or a less powerful road? What kind of space and what kind of power?

Chair: Monica Erwer, The Swallows India Bangladesh/ School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg

SESSION 3: Contradictory interests within civil society: Open conflicts and new state-civil society relations

Chair: Henrik Berglund, Dept. of Political Science, Stockholm University

SESSION 4: Civil society and the demands from donors: Caught between a rock and a hard place

Chair: Helena Bjuremalm, Dept. for Empowerment, Swedish International Development Agency (Sida)

17.00 **End of Day One**

Wednesday, March 24

- 09.15 **Introducion to day 2**
Henning Melber, The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation
- 09.30 **Unleashing the power: Civil society and participatory democratization**
Kumi Naidoo, Executive Director of Greenpeace International, former Secretary General of CIVICUS (To be confirmed.)
- 10.00 Group discussions and general discussion

10.30 COFFEE

CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRATIC CHANGE

11.00 **Africa**
Lloyd Sachikonye, Institute of Development Studies, University of Zimbabwe

11.20 **Asia**
Nandini Sundar, Delhi School of Economics, Delhi University

11.40 **Latin America**
Evelina Dagnino, Dept. of Political Science, University of Campinas, Brazil

12.00 **Middle East**
Saad Eddin Ibrahim, Drew University, New Jersey

12.20 **Group discussions and general discussion**

13.00 LUNCH

14.00 **PARALLEL SESSIONS: REGIONAL CHALLENGES**
(Coffee served during workshops)

SESSION 5: The role of Middle East civil society in democratization
Chair: Michael Schulz, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg
Discussant: Saad Eddin Ibrahim

SESSION 6: African governments, civil society and democracy
Chair: Henning Melber, The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation
Discussant: Lloyd Sachikonye

SESSION 7: Religious discourses as a part of civil society formation and democratization in Asia
Chair: Ann Kull, Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies, Lund University
Discussant: Nandini Sundar

SESSION 8: Latin American *ciudadanía* or *citizenship* - different notions of citizens and political participation
Chair: Veronica Melander, Secretariat for Research Cooperation, Swedish International Development Agency (Sida)
Discussant: Evelina Dagnino

16.00 **Summing up: Civil society and the search of democracy**
Kumi Naidoo, Secretary General of Green Peace International (to be confirmed)

17.00 **End of Conference**

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PARALLEL SESSIONS

DAY 1, March 23: UNDERSTANDING DIVERSE CIVIL SOCIETY

SESSION 1: Uncivil Attachments: The Role of Ethnic Affiliations, Kinship Bonds and Patron-Client Relations in Contemporary Popular Politics

Chair: Beppe Karlsson, Dept. of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University

Discussant: (to be decided in February)

The notion of civil society commonly assumes rational, autonomous individuals that voluntarily engage in civic activities to pursue common interests. Such individuals are further taken to be citizens with certain recognized rights and obligations, and subsequently it is presumed that much of their collective action is geared towards such state sanctioned entitlements. As we have become increasingly aware of during the last decades, such a depiction of political engagements is at odds with the empirical reality in many, if not most, parts of the world. In this session we invite papers that seek to develop a more grounded understanding of contemporary politics, noting that individuals enter the public sphere as socially embedded persons and hence that “uncivil” attachments such as those based on ethnicity and kinship will inform their actions to a great extent. We further hope to explore the effects of differently functioning states (or non-functional states) on people’s strategies to fend for themselves, and on the implications for the larger project of promoting democratic governance.

SESSION 2: Gendered participation in civil society: “New“ spaces for women or a less powerful road? What kind of space and what kind of power?

Chair: Monica Erwer, The Swallows India Bangladesh/School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg

Discussant: (to be decided in February)

Today women’s participation in civil society takes several roads, not only in liberal and outspoken feminist associations, but increasingly, at least in India, also in conservative movements. Are there similar experiences in regions outside South Asia? Is this a sign of failure of the radical women’s movement? Some scholars question the strong research focus on women’s participation in civil society since real power lies in political parties and government structures, where women still have little influence and participation. In what way can women’s participation in civil society challenge these unequal power structures?

SESSION 3: Contradictory interests within civil society: Open conflicts and new state-civil society relations

Chair: Henrik Berglund, Dept. of Political Science, Stockholm University

Discussant: (to be decided in February)

Civil society is expected to function as a counter weight to an often oppressive state and to provide an opening for democratization. However, civil society itself contains social forces with contradictory interests, which may lead to conflict within civil society, but also to different relations to the state. The session invites to empirically based contributions from all continents that discuss the tensions within civil society, as well as the sometimes contradictory choices between autonomy and state collaboration.

SESSION 4: Civil society and the demands from donors: Caught between a rock and a hard place

Chair: Helena Bjuremalm, Dept. for Empowerment, Swedish International Development Agency (Sida)

Discussant: (to be decided in February)

The new so called Aid Architecture (Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action) gradually puts more emphasis on the role of civil society in development and the use of so called basket funding mechanisms. However, community based organizations (CSOs) in developing countries rarely fit the requirements set up. Demands on civil society associations commonly involve free membership, horizontal and democratic structures, transparency, and complex procedures for planning and result based management. To meet such standards, national and centrally based NGOs may act as middle men, translating grassroots action to language and matrixes that donors understand, and need, to be able to account to their governments and parliaments. This session will discuss how such demands from donors affect the inner life of social movements and interest groups and the environment in which they act.

DAY 2, March 24: REGIONAL CHALLENGES

SESSION 5: The role of Middle East civil society in democratization

Chair: Michael Schulz, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg

Discussant: Saad Eddin Ibrahim

Civil society in the Middle East has mostly been discussed in relation to the difficulties to *democratize* the region mainly due to restrictions imposed by the state. However, civil society has increasingly developed *transnational* and *global* networks, in which exchanges and different democratization attempts impact on the potential to democratize the region. How different experiences of civil society actors in these processes should be judged is, hence, an important empirical question to study.

SESSION 6: African governments, civil society and democracy

Chair: Henning Melber, The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation

Discussant: Lloyd Sachikonye

African societies have displayed since decolonization strong autocratic tendencies and features of neo-patrimonial, if not despotic rule. The state is under control by a government occupied by a small political elite, which executes the power of definition in discourses and keeps a tight grip over the public sphere. Autonomous organization of democratically oriented civil society actors and grass root social movements demanding participation, civil rights, equality and justice face difficult circumstances and risks. They are often accused of being externally directed agents for regime change as part of an “imperialist conspiracy”. Scholars, practitioners and activists alike are invited to share their views and experiences how a struggle for democratic rights can be made more efficient in the light of these restrictive circumstances.

SESSION 7: Religious discourses as a part of civil society formation and democratization in Asia

Chair: Ann Kull, Centre for East and Southeast Asian Studies, Lund University

Discussant: Nandini Sundar

Religion and its values constitute an important part of many Asian societies and as such it can provide a vehicle for social and political change. Individuals and organisations use liberal, humanistic and gender sensitive interpretations of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and other religions in processes of civil society formation and democratization; engaged either in ideology production or in faith rights based agency and activism. This session welcomes presentations on such processes.

SESSION 8: Latin American *ciudadanía* or *citizenship* - different notions of citizens and political participation

Chair: Veronica Melander

Discussant: Evelina Dagnino

Civil society organizations and social movements in Latin America have broadened the concept of citizenship to include not only civic rights, but also the social, economic, cultural and ecological rights. Consequently, this new notion of citizenship relates not only to the national state, but also to the local and international levels of community. The session invites presentations that discuss civil society, citizenship and political participation in Latin America.