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Institutional Development for Strengthening Civil Society

by L. David Brown & Rajesh Tandon

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Introduction

In the past five years, considerable interest in the development of civil society in different regions of the world has generated new ideas about ways to strengthen socio-economic development process in the communities and countries of the North as well as the South. Various actors within the civil society have been seen as important contributors to constructive social change, voluntary development organizations (VDOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), people's movements and others have come to be seen as important actors within the civil society to promote such constructive social change. It is in this context that understanding strategies for strengthening civil society acquires new importance. While work on capacity-building of non-governmental organizations, voluntary development agencies and consumer groups has been in practice over more than a decade in different parts of the world, little conceptualization of that practice has occurred. Even less is known about strategies for strengthening the diversity of actors within the civil society. It is clear that interventions aimed at institutional development (ID) of civil society actors would be required to enhance the potential of civil society for constructive social change in different regions of the world.

Historically, capacity-building interventions with voluntary organizations and NGOs have largely focused at organizational level of analysis, emphasizing improvements in performance and processes and structures for the same. ID interventions aimed at strengthening the entire sector of civil society have been much less in practice, and even less is known about them conceptually. But it is clear that evolution of civil society as an important player in relation to the state and the market will necessitate enhancing the sectoral

capacities of civil society actors. Therefore, Institutional Development interventions aimed at the sector of civil society have potentially enormous implications in the near future. Likewise, the challenge of the contemporary context necessitates that the sector of civil society learns to interact and engage in a meaningful manner with the sector of the state and sector of the market, thereby generating possibilities for societal development as a whole. Therefore, interventions aimed at improving this engagement between the civil society, on the one hand, and the sectors of the state and the market, on the other, will require ID interventions at the societal level of analysis. Such interventions are few and far between in practice, and even less is known about them conceptually.

This paper, therefore, aims to develop a comprehensive and holistic approach towards Institutional Development for strengthening civil society. It looks at a variety of actors within the civil society. It looks at the relationship of the civil society sector with the sectors of the state and the market. It analysis ID interventions at the levels of organizations, sectors and society, and it promotes reflection on the necessity of building a holistic approach to ID interventions for strengthening civil society.

The material for this paper has been created on the basis of work that our respective institutions have been engaged in independently and together over the last fifteen years in different parts of the world. The practice of institutional development on the ground with some actors of the civil society and our participation in finding ways to strengthen their contribution to the civil society in different countries and regions of the world provides the basis for this reflection and conceptualization.

Framework

Interventions with the ambit of the phrase institutional developments (ID) are a recent conceptualization in the field of civil society. The term 'institution' has often been equated with organization. Here, we look at institution beyond the level of organization as social orders and patterns, networks of organizations and associations. Therefore, institution has a broader meaning and implication in the context of societal values. Institutions are practices and arrangements, mechanisms and values that persist over time and acquire legitimacy within a given society. This is how institutionalization of practices and arrangements conceptualized to provide a long-term, self sustaining character to those arrangements. In this sense, institutions can be seen to operate at several levels: at the level of the organization, at the level of the social sectors and the level of societies, and globally as well. They vary in the degree of formalization of their arrangements and mechanisms

as well as the extent to which these forms have been explicitly recorded. Used in this sense, ID interventions are planned actions that create or strengthen social orders or patterns, arrangements or mechanisms for long-term sustainability. ID interventions, therefore, can be viewed as planned initiatives to strengthen social patterns and practices at different levels of analysis to achieve broader purposes.

Civil society in our framework includes the web of associations, social norms and practices that comprise social activity different from activities of the institutions of the state (such as political parties, government agencies or norms about voting) or the institutions of the market (such as corporations, stock markets or expectations about the honoring of contracts). Strengthening civil society requires improving intellectual, material and organizational bases of actors of the civil society. In contemporary context, these actors include associations, voluntary agencies,

non-governmental organizations, people's movements, citizen groups, consumer associations, small producer associations and cooperatives, women's organizations, indigenous people's associations, etc. In this sense, civil society in a particular context may comprise of a variety of actors, both of the indigenous variety and those of modern framework.

These are different from the actors of the state which include political parties and their front organizations, government agencies, military and law and order machinery, judiciary, etc. They are also distinct from the institutions of the market which comprise of national and multi-national corporations, financial institutions and their inter-locking arrangements. This paper is concerned with ID interventions that enhance the intellectual understanding, material resources and organizational capacities of actors within civil society, individually and collectively, as well as their relations with actors in the other sectors of society, in particular of the state and the market.

This distinction between civil society institutions and those of the state and the market requires some clarification. In different regions and countries of the world, due to different historical processes and contexts, different elements of the three sectors have acquired different salience and importance. The concept of the nation-state is essentially a post-second world war practice in many countries of the South. The state-led model of development was given primacy since the second world war and resulted in the description of the state as the *first* sector of the society. In many countries of the North, market was seen as a primary agency of economic development and was called as the *second* sector of society. During much of the past five decades, socio-economic development was seen as a balance between the polarities of the state and the market. It is only now in the past few years that fresh understanding of the *trinity* has begun to emerge. Overcoming the polarity of the state and the market is the *third* leg of development called civil society. Therefore, civil society



as a sector continuously interacts with the state and the market. In some countries, one sector may erode capacities of the other through its predominance. In countries like Sweden and India, too much reliance on the state has undermined civil society. In countries like the United States, too much reliance on the market has undermined civil society. Conceptually, it is important to see the state, the market and civil society as interacting and over-lapping circles (see Figure I).

These three institutional sectors in terms of their scope, capacity and contributions to the socio-economic development of a given society vary. In some cases, the state is so dominant that it absorbs both the market and the civil society. For example, in a country like India, the state had taken over the functions of the civil society and the market and become the dominant actor. In some other situations, the market dominates both the state and the civil society and becomes the key player. It is our contention that a balance between these three legs of institutional sectors is necessary for sustainable and just socio-economic development and democratic governance. The state, the market and civil society need

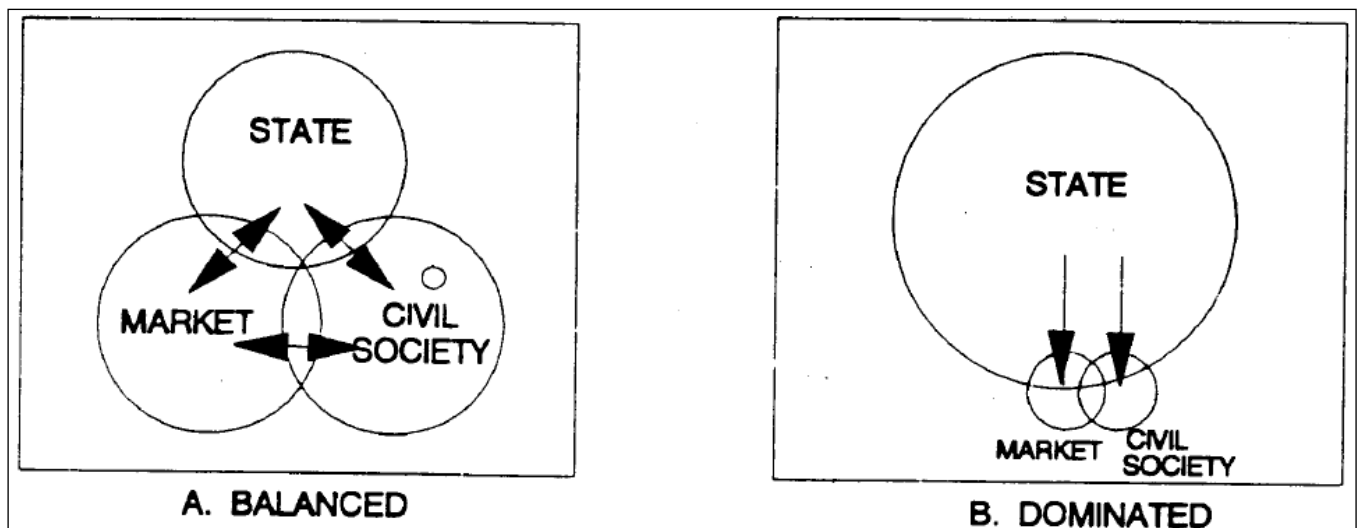


FIGURE I Institutional Sectors: State, Market and Civil Society

to interact in a manner that is mutually accountable, supportive and synergistic. So the key question is not whether the dominance of the state or the market has to be established. The key question is not whether the state or the market dominates, but what kind of state and what kind of market, and how are they accountable to civil society. Viewed in this sense, civil society is not the third sector as some have begun to label it, following the first sector of the state and the second of the market. In this sense, civil society is *the first sector*.

Historically as well as contemporarily, various actors within civil society are not necessarily homogenous, mutually supportive or working towards common purposes. There are many situations where fragmentation, conflict and even war is taking place around regional, linguistic, religious, ethnic divides and is significantly fragmenting and civil society itself. The same processes can obtain within the sector of the state as well as the market.

In that sense ID interventions aimed at strengthening civil society would attempt to build a common purpose and mutually enhancing interaction among the diverse actors of civil society as well as aim to strengthen its engagement with other institutional sectors: *the state and the market*.

ID interventions, therefore, can be focused at different levels of analysis. Historically, these interventions aimed at strengthening civil society actors were seen as interventions at the organizational level. Organization Development (OD), as the theory and practice of strengthening organizations has been applied with considerable success with certain actors of civil society. Capacity-building and OD interventions have been attempted with voluntary development organizations and NGOs in many parts of the world. Therefore, in this paper, ID interventions will be described first at the level of organization.

Institutional Development at the Organizational Level

Much of the practice of ID interventions in strengthening civil society draws its theoretical and practical guidelines from organizations operating in the market and the state. Organizational development theory and technology evolved from the practice of improving the performance and effectiveness of organizations of the government and its related agencies (public sector), on the one hand, and corporations and market mechanisms (private sector), on the other. These interventions have aimed at improving efficient use of resources, planned adaptation to technological change and environmental turbulence and improved functioning in the short and long term. Developing learning capacity within these organizations has been a major purpose of ID interventions in the past. While ID theory and practice drawn from the organizations of the state and the market has been applied to some actors within civil society (like voluntary development organizations and NGOs), it has not been carried in a way that has developed fresh theoretical perspectives on civil society organizations. Though some innovative

work in organizational development with voluntary agencies and NGOs has been reported, yet, ID with mission-oriented social change organizations rooted in civil society still requires further conceptualization. Broadly speaking, therefore, ID interventions aimed at mission-oriented organizations (like VDOs) can be categorized as below:

Clarify Organizational Identity, Values and Strategy of Impact

Development NGOs are often organized around values and visions of a better society, and they recruit staff who are committed to those visions. They mobilize human and financial resources by appeals to improving the world, and so depend heavily on clear and compelling identities as solvers of social problems. Often such NGOs become adept at articulating a visionary message and skilled in carrying specific programmes-but they are often less skilled at making the links between specific programs-which may be driven by immediate needs



for material resources and demands from constituents and the social visions they seek to promote. Clarifying strategies for social impact, and supporting the development of more carefully planned and strategic portfolios of activity can have a major impact on the activities and effectiveness of such organizations. ID interventions that then create mechanisms for more systematic planning, more strategic use of resources, and more effective learning from experience can greatly enhance VDO/NGO long term impacts. Clarifying or reformulating Mission and Strategy and engaging in systematic strategic planning are some examples of ID interventions in this category.

Build Organizational Capacities for Governance, Decision-making, and Conflict Management

Citizen groups, consumer associations or NGOs are often organized as small informal agencies around a leader or a small group that makes decisions informally. As they grow and undertake more complex activities, “kitchen table” decision-making mechanisms are often inadequate and new institutional arrangements have to be developed to make effective decisions, hold organizational subunits accountable, and resolve differences among organizational departments and divisions. The complexity of development activities and the variety of external constituents to whom such organizations must respond set the stage for internal conflicts. Their reliance on informal mechanisms and shared values instead of other organizing mechanisms predispose them to effective performance and crippling internal conflicts. ID interventions that help to create more orderly and efficient ways to divide labour, coordinate activities, and resolve disputes can be extremely helpful. This is where interventions aimed at strengthening governance mechanisms and processes, systems and procedures for decision-making, formal structures, roles and accountability systems can greatly improve performance and effectiveness of such organizations.

Develop Human Resources that Combine Commitment with Technical Capacities

Civil society organizations attract staff by appeals to values and visions as well as by offering salaries. Indeed, many staff members accept lower rates of pay than they might otherwise have because they care about the organization’s mission; others volunteer their time and expertise. Human resources are often at a premium in such organizations, which frequently undertake mammoth tasks with severely limited energy and expertise. Many such organizations struggle with the challenges of recruiting or developing more “professional” staff who can manage the demands of increasingly large and complex projects. Leaders of such organizations often burn out from the strain of managing complex organizations and activities without adequate training or resources. ID interventions that enable their volunteers and staff to manage expanding and challenging workloads and to mobilize more technical expertise without fundamentally undermining their social commitments are critically important.

Foster Capacities for Organizational Learning

Most such organizations operate in environmental contexts that are undergoing rapid change, and their activities may foster some of those changes. Their effectiveness largely depends upon their unique characteristics of innovation, flexibility and responsiveness. Therefore, capacity for organizational learning can be essential to their continued effectiveness. Many such organizations are so overwhelmed with the day-to-day demands on their time, they have little opportunity to systematically learn from their experience. For many small groups and associations, learning capacity is largely embodied in the person of their leaders and founders. If those leaders become incapacitated, the organization is paralyzed. ID interventions that build and institutionalize organization-wide learning capacity can be essential to preserving the unique characteristics and the continued viability and effectiveness of such organizations.

Institutional Development Interventions at the Sectoral Level

What is ID at the sectoral level? While it is often possible to identify clearly the values, goals and strategies against which to measure an organization, such clarity is difficult to attain at the sector level. Since civil society is comprised of such a bewildering array of small, informal, often widely different organizations, widespread agreement about goals and values might even restrict the capacity of civil society to respond to and innovate on emerging social problems. On the other hand, civil societies that lack minimal intellectual, material, and organizational bases for articulating goals and mobilizing human resources are not likely to play an important social role.

While the role of civil society varies across countries and cultures, most definitions of “strong” civil society would probably include some similar elements. *Intellectual bases* might include recognition of sector activities as socially legitimate, widespread understanding of the comparative advantages of civil society organizations, and ideological commitments by their members to socially acceptable goals and values. In countries where the state has been seen as the primary engine of development, for example, such intellectual bases may not exist. The dominant definition of material interest and development for public good in many countries of Asia and Africa is provided by the state. *Material bases*

for a strong civil society might include the availability of human resources to support sector activities, minimal levels of political acceptance, and financial resources to enable sector work. In Bangladesh, for example, an otherwise strong community of development NGOs remains heavily dependent on international financial support. The *organizational bases* of civil society might include legal arrangements that support and protect its activities, networks of associations and organizations committed to solving problems untouched by the state and market sectors, and social norms and expectations that enable joint action and mutual learning. Many countries in the Arab region and Eastern/Central Europe do not have appropriate legal frameworks that legitimize institutions of civil society.

ID interventions intended to strengthen civil society as a *sector* remain relatively uncommon. We focus here on interventions that illustrate some possibilities for strengthening civil society as a sector. It is worth noting that practical efforts at sectoral intervention have been increasing over the past decade, though theorizing about the issues involved remains in its infancy. We can identify a number of generic ID interventions at the sectoral level.

Create Forums for Identifying Shared Issues and Building Shared Perspectives

The diversity and complexity of civil society can undermine the abilities of its members to recognize issues on which they have shared interests or to develop common perspectives on the work of the sector. While it is a great strength of civil society that organizations spring up to respond to the special concerns and values of their members, the capacity of the sector to deal with larger issues can be seriously hampered by the diversity and fragmentation of its members.

In many countries and regions during the last decade, associations and networks have emerged to enable wider sharing of information and building common understandings. Such sectoral, national and regional associations can clarify the intellectual bases of members' activities as well as mobilize their constituents for joint actions.

The Voluntary Action Network, India (VANI) was organized by several dozen independent development NGOs, who were concerned about proposed changes in government regulations. Debates over the appropriate roles of NGOs and government resulted in agreement to continue and expand the network to enable wiser understanding and appreciation of roles of voluntary action among government agencies, donor organizations, and the general public. Over time VANI has grown to include scores of Indian voluntary organizations and has undertaken a much expanded range of activities on their behalf.

The functions of such sectoral institutions may be very limited or quite extensive. Organizations with initially limited purposes, such as information sharing, may

develop much larger and more complex agendas and functions as new needs emerge. VANI has expanded significantly its activities as its membership has expanded, a shared analysis of sectoral needs has emerged, and sources of material resources beyond the budgets of its immediate members have been accessed. ID interventions aimed at creation and strengthening of such sectoral forums, networks or associations can be critical for enhancing the impact of civil society.

Promote Mechanisms to Represent Key Sectoral Issues

As a sector, civil society organizations lack variety of capacities and resources. These become even more aggravated in situations of crisis and mounting challenges facing a country. Promotion of new mechanisms and arrangements at sectoral level to address these becomes a critical challenge for the long-term viability and effectiveness of the sector as a whole.

A constant source of irritation and weakness in civil society is its fragile material base. Financial resources needed for civil society organizations are scarce, and vary with changing donor priorities and preferences. Many donor practices and procedures further undermine the autonomy and creativity of civil society activities. Concerted sectoral response is needed to deal with such situations. For example, VANI has engaged in systematic documentation and dialogue with national and international donors to improve their practices and procedures in India.

In several cases, new financial mechanisms are being evolved to address the problem at the sectoral level. Synergos Institute is promoting creation of a number of community-based foundations to mobilize resources for actors of civil society (Ecuador and Mozambique are two examples.) Promotion of new financial instruments (like venture capital) by RAFFAD/IREC is another example for small cooperative economic enterprises. Many countries are evolving mechanisms to mobilize public donation and promote greater philanthropy to strengthen the financial base for the civil society sector.

For many civil society organizations concerned with social and economic development, influencing national policy formulation and implementation has become central to expanding and sustaining improvements in the lives of grassroots populations. As individual organizations they have relatively little chance of influencing, or even understanding, government policies. As a larger coalition of interested organizations, however, they may mobilize more intellectual, material and political resources for influence:

The Congress for a People's Agrarian Reform (CPAR) in the Philippines was organized to lobby for meaningful land reform. Its members included twelve national people's organizations, spanning diverse ideological perspectives, and

fourteen diverse NGOs. The Secretariat facilitated negotiation and agreement among members to carry out a national education and lobbying campaign that last for several years. The campaign increased public awareness of land reform issues even though it did not achieve many of its legislative goals. It also built dramatically expanded capacity for coalition building and joint action in a sector known for partisan bickering across ideological dividing lines.

Building coalitions within civil society depends on the development of norms and mechanisms for handling differences. Coalition experience can strengthen or weaken those institutional bases for the future, depending on the extent to which experience builds norms of reciprocity, tolerance, and social trust. The extent to which such norms have been developed will shape responses to crises and other situations for which elaborate preparations are not possible. Unpredicted opportunities or threats can test the extent to which the institutions of civil society enable the management of differences, the analysis of complex situations, and the initiation of concerted action on behalf of the sector. Recent assertion of fundamentalist forces in South Asia posed such challenge to civil society. In India, many diverse actors within civil society came together to launch a “People’s Campaign for Secularism”. In Bangladesh, fundamentalists attacked several NGOs engaged in education and empowerment of women. The Association of Development Agencies Bangladesh (ADAB) worked with media, academia, workers’ movement, women’s movement and cultural groups to promote a broad coalition to counter such forces.

Efforts to articulate and speak for sectoral interests inevitably, given the diversity of the sector, generate disagreements. On the other hand, the engagement and discussion of differences in itself can build institutional arrangements-forums, norms of respect and tolerance, skills in facilitation and difference management-that support effective future action. Debates and discussions can refine the intellectual basis for agreement among different actors as well as foster organizations and relationships for future cooperation. ID interventions aimed at creating and nurturing such initiatives and mechanisms can greatly strengthen civil society.

Build Systems to Develop Sector Human Resources

The institutions of civil society depend on the quality of human resources who care enough about issues to invest time and energy to resolve them. Commitment to work on social problems is not always closely related to the skills and expertise they require, so organizations of civil society frequently struggle to match available human resources to the needs. In most countries the financial and occupational rewards of work in civil society are less than those available in the market and state sectors. Finding professionals with the right commitment or training committed staff in the right skills is not easy.

ID interventions can strengthen the capacity of civil society to develop human resources over the need longer term. Creating systems that encourage discussion and planning can powerfully affect sectoral patterns of human resource development and utilization. Enhancing the intellectual and materials base for leadership perspectives shape the practices for their organizations and networks.

The Philippine Canadian Human Resource Development Council (PCHRD) brought together representatives of ideologically diverse wings of the development NGO community to create policies for human resource development to guide allocation of funds provided by CIDA. PCHRD encouraged thinking about human resource issues from diverse perspectives, enabled allocation of resources to priorities shared across the sector, and contributed to increasing the ability of Filipino NGOs to build coalitions across previously difficult-to-bridge ideological differences.

More direct strengthening of the institutional bases for human resource development may be possible through the provision of training and research support to the sector. In many countries such organizations over the last decade have increasingly called for training, research, and organizational capacity-building. Creating indigenous *support institutions* to respond to these needs can have effects well beyond solving the immediate problem of human resources, since the educational process can involve considerable impacts on intellectual perspectives as well as material and organizational capacities. The promotion of the network



of support organizations in some countries of South Asia has been an important ID intervention in this regard.

The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) developed an intensive, experiential program to train NGO staff in participatory training methods for work with grassroots groups. Within in a few years, many from the NGO community had participated in the program, and PRIA had become a central node for an emerging progressive support organization network. A follow-up program for leadership teams on NGO Mission, Strategy and Structure provided key concepts for enhancing impacts of many NGOs. Together these programs contributed to building an interpersonal network and a set of concepts that influence the current practices of many Indian development NGOs. PRIA then promoted the evolution of a network of Regional Support Organizations in different states of India. It also collaborated with Institute for Development Research (IDR) to help strengthen a similar network of Support Organizations in South Asia.

ID interventions that support the development of sectoral human resources can use educational tools and materials developed in other regions and settings. But, direct transfer of materials and programs from other countries and sectors has been substantially less successful. If civil society is to have access to human resources tailored to sectoral needs, educational institutions dedicated to its special needs and perspectives will need to emerge to provide specialized services. ID interventions aimed at strengthening the long-term HRD capacities within civil society is a key ingredient in the strengthening of civil society.

Create Processes for Learning from Sector Experience

The diversity and small scale of civil society as a sector may inhibit mutual learning from sharing and assessing each other's experience. All too often, NGOs, people's organizations, unions, and neighborhood associations remain focused on their immediate problems and suspicious of outsiders, and so spend much time and energy in "reinventing the wheel" that has been created many times by others. Many agencies are so overwhelmed with the challenges of responding to difficult problems with inadequate resources that they have little time or energy to reflect on past experience, little skill in conceptualizing issues, and restricted access to others' solutions.

ID interventions that create a context and a process for reflecting on past experience can catalyze new insights that will form future practice. Facilitating reflections on issues that are of mutual interest to participating individuals and organizations can provide a base for important new understanding and action.

The NGO Coalition on Development and Environment (CODE-NGO) in the Philippines has used support from IDR to write case studies of efforts to influence national policy by eight different networks and coalitions of NGOs and grassroots groups. The cases were then analyzed in a joint conference with IDR researchers to identify lessons that might form the base for a capacity-building program for organizations of the civil society. It is hoped that this program will produce ideas and concepts to enable more effective policy influence in the future.

Such learning processes can expand the intellectual base of civil society as well as clarify the institutional mechanisms needed to solve key sectoral problems, such as influencing the formulation and implementation of national policies. Other interventions can focus directly on identifying sectoral problems and their solutions.

The Participatory Rural Initiatives Program (PRIP) in Bangladesh has focused on training, consultation, and program development to strengthen small development NGOs, NGO support organizations, and NGO networks and forums in Bangladesh. PRIP has worked with external resources and NGO leaders to develop a framework for assessing organizations, train consultants in participatory assessment techniques, systematically assess needs for the sector, and develop appropriate local materials and programs to strengthen those agencies. The effort has produced new understanding of the needs of the sector as well as local materials, programs and staff to respond to them.

Interventions aimed at the creation and strengthening of mechanisms like PRIP and CODE-NGO can be particularly significant in this regard. ID interventions to foster learning from experience are particularly important to enhancing the intellectual base of civil society. They may also, however, have major impacts on the material and organizational bases of the sector, in that they enhance the capacity for social problem-solving that is a primary sectoral contribution. Arrangements that foster social learning strike at the core of civil society's role in the larger society, and so may have wider effects than is at first obvious.

Institution Development Interventions at the Societal Level

ID interventions that have impacts at the societal level are increasingly important as organizations of civil society seek to expand their influence over other sectors and the society as a whole. Organizations from civil society often cannot foster large-scale, sustainable

improvements that affect poor and disenfranchised populations without engaging direct relations with corporations, banks and other institutions from the market sector, or with government bureaucracies, political parties, and other agencies of the state.

What is a “strong” society? Definitions vary considerably, and depend heavily on choices among core values, many of them mutually contradictory. We will not try to propose any simple definitions of a “good” society here, but do believe that concentration of too much power that has led to disillusionment with “pure” capitalism and “pure” socialism. While the nature of relations among the market, the state, and civil society should be worked out to fit the core values and concerns of a given region or country, we believe that encouraging sectors strong enough to offer alternatives and checks on each other is desirable.

The examples of ID interventions at the societal level described in this section suggest ways to foster strong and effective civil society interaction with them. These interventions may be undertaken from many vantage points. Some of the following examples have been initiated by actors in civil society; other by corporate executives; still others by government agencies. They represent illustrations of high priority areas for ID intervention rather than an exhaustive catalogue of possibilities.

Create Institutions that Establish and Safeguard Sectoral Independence

The issue of sectoral identity and independence is particularly live in societies where some sectors have been dominated by others. In many developing countries, for example, the state has dominated the civil society and in some cases systematically undermined or harassed organizations that have demonstrated any independent initiatives. The threat to independence

may be blatant, as in the suppression of the institutions of civil society by a military dictator; it may also be more subtle, as in the gradual takeover of civil society functions by the market in the United States and by the state in Sweden.

ID interventions can help to clarify the independent roles of the different sectors or reaffirm the importance of their autonomy. Such interventions can take the form of establishing and preserving fundamental legal institutions, such as the political rights to freedom of speech, association and assembly – without which it may be very difficult to create and maintain effective organizations of civil society. The identity and independence of sectoral institutions can also be protected by interventions that create more specific areas of independent activity.

The amended Constitution of the Philippines provides for making policy at the level of municipal government in regular consultation with NGOs and people’s organizations. This provision establishes a legal position for organizations of civil society in that it makes their participation in municipal decision-making more likely in the future.

It is clear that recognition for autonomous identity of civil society and safeguarding the independence of its intellectual, material and organizational bases is not uniformly occurring in all countries and regions. This is a critical need for ensuring the contribution of civil society, and it requires specific ID interventions as described above.



The autonomous identity and independence of the civil society requires some minimal level of institutional recognition, some shared understanding of their particular role, and some control over key political and economic resources. ID interventions by actors in civil society, in other sectors, and from outside the country can help to establish and preserve that identity, even in the teeth of determined challenges.

Encourage Forums that Foster Intersectoral Dialogue and Mutual Influence

Actors in one sector often have strong stereotypes and little information about actors in other sectors. Corporate executives are seen as greedy and rapacious; government officials are regarded as bureaucratic and corrupt; NGO leaders are dismissed as impractical idealists. Mutual ignorance can produce indifference or active conflict across sectors. ID interventions that encourage productive dialogue and mutual influence can clarify the special resources and comparative advantages of each sector and enhance the legitimacy of their differences.

The Bangladesh Expanded Program of Immunization sought to rapidly expand immunization of the children of Bangladesh, a task well beyond the capacities of the responsible state agencies. A coalition of international donors, government agencies, NGOs, media, corporations, and citizen groups carried out a multi-year campaign to “Immunize Your Child” that increased immunizations rates from 5% to 80% of the population and reduced child mortality by 20%. In the course of this campaign, initial conflicts between government and NGO staff were significantly reduced as they came to an increased appreciation of each others resources and special capacities.

In many developing countries, the boundary between civil society and the state is particularly conflicted. When organisations of civil society become large and popular with a mass audience, state agencies may suspect them of political ambitions. Suspicions may become particularly acute when citizen groups criticize government efforts to promote “law and order” or deliver services to grassroots groups or when NGOs are seen as controlling resources in their own interest. ID interventions can balance power differences between civil society and the state to enable more effective patterns of dialogue and mutual influence across sectoral differences.

In recent years, there has been an increasing experimentation with dialogue and collaboration across different sectors. Many recent examples indicate long-term partnership between citizen groups, NGOs, media, academia, etc., on the one hand, and government agencies, national and international development and aid agencies (bilateral and multilateral), on the other hand, to address concrete problems of poverty, education,

health, violence, AIDS, pollution, degradation, etc. Such *development partnerships* do not occur on their own, but require specific interventions to facilitate dialogue and action. ID interventions aimed at promoting such dialogue and initiating creation of such forums for ongoing collaboration can be particularly important in this context.

It is also possible to work with the institutions at the boundary between civil society and the market, such as cooperatives, that enable grassroots groups to compete in the market or volunteer programs that enable corporate executives to contribute to civil society. Promoting ways to engage market institutions to listen and respond to consumer movements in different areas can be important illustrations of ID interventions in this regard. Such ID interventions make it possible to use the resources of both sectors in social problem-solving.

The Philippine Business for Social Progress Foundation (PBSP) links the resources and skills of the corporate community to the commitment and expertise of development NGOs. PBSP has funded a number of innovative civil society projects and organizations, and has been a leader in introducing organization strategy and management concepts to civil society organizations as well as providing material resources for development projects.

There is increasing interest among leaders of civil society to engage in dialogue across sectoral differences. This reflects changing perceptions of the possibility for finding common ground with the state and the market that may pave the way for more innovative joint ventures in the near future.

Create Institutions to Foster Societal Learning Across Sectors

The organizations of civil society contain much potential for social innovation in response to strongly-held social values. It is in the interest of the society to create arrangements that will allow widespread use of this potential and to foster engagement across sectors that sparks creative solutions to social problems. ID interventions that encourage intersectoral learning can use the diverse information and resources of the sectors, but they must also cope with differences and misunderstandings.

The Small Farmer Irrigation Management Program in Indonesia brought together NGOs, universities, water-user associations, government agencies, and international donors to investigate the possibility of turning over control of small irrigation systems to water user associations to articulate needed policies, and to train government agencies and water user associations in their new responsibilities. As a result the government was able to reduce its financial obligations to manage the systems and the farmers were able to get an improved irrigation system and management.

Such intersectoral arrangements are difficult to design and manage, since they must deal with so many differences and tensions. On the other hand, their success may enhance the intellectual, material and

institutional bases of the market and state sectors as well as civil society. They also create the social bases for further cooperation among the parties in the future, and so lay the foundations for continuing joint learning.

Discussion

The preceding analysis generates some common themes relevant for ID interventions in strengthening civil society. Issues of *identity, values, and strategy* recur at different levels. In part this reflects the nature of the sector, which is to a large extent premised on the value commitments of its citizens. At the organizational level, development NGOs and other organizations of civil society are often very focused on a specific problem or region, and relatively oblivious to the larger implications of their work and position. Interventions can strengthen these organizations by helping to clarify values, to articulate the missions and visions of organizations, and to focus resource allocations into specific strategies and goals. At the sectoral level, the diversity of goals and values can be overwhelming, and ID interventions that help the myriads of sector organizations focus their energies on specific threats or opportunities enable a kind of cohesive sectoral action that is relatively rare. At the societal level, interventions that clarify the

differences among the sectors, their contributions to the larger societal whole, and the reasons for preserving their independence and autonomy can help establish ongoing paradigms and rationales for the existence of multiple sectors – which to some look quite redundant and duplicative. The task of establishing and preserving organizational and institutional identities in civil society is challenging, and demands attention at several levels.

For similar reasons the issues of *governance and conflict management* can be important at several levels. Within specific organizations, the variety of stakeholders and the emphasis on organizing around values and ideologies can create serious internal conflicts that undermine traditional governance and decision-making systems. At the sectoral level, the wide variety of entities that make up the sector pose challenges to efforts at sectoral governance and decision-making. When resource scarcities and political pressures



encourage competition among sector members, conflict may escalate beyond constructive bounds. Conflict at the societal level, between sectors or across regions, can also escalate quickly without the creation of institutional orders and practices that emphasize joint understanding, intersectoral dialogue, and mutual influence. The fragmented nature of civil society makes it difficult to engage in concerted action at the outset, and the ineffectuality of organizations in civil society may be exacerbated by conflicts with other sectors.

The problems of *developing human resources* also recur across levels. The challenge of recruiting or training people with both commitment and technical skill to carry out organizational tasks is perennial in such organizations. At the sector level, few concerted, long-term HRD efforts exist to prepare an ongoing pool of people to participate in institutions of civil society. People with capacities to lead sector-wide agencies, such as associations, support organizations and interorganizational networks are rarely prepared for the special challenges of their roles. Sectoral interventions are needed to create long-term HRD mechanisms in civil society. At the societal level, human resources who can understand the perspectives of the different sectors and develop visions and strategies that synthesize across those perspectives are desperately needed. It is still quite rare to find leaders who have leadership experience that is grounded in all three sectors; few have any experience outside of a single sector.

Finally, the theme of *ongoing learning* recurs at each level, albeit not always focused on the same issues. Organizations of civil society need to adapt to rapid change and to the evolution of their complex tasks, and they cannot adapt appropriately without a commitment to continuing learning and some organizational capacities to support that commitment. At the sectoral level, such actors concerned with development must grapple with the rapid changes that confront civil society on the basis of both national and international turbulence. Finally, societies as a whole are caught in situations where the failure to learn may condemn the whole society to unproductive recycling of history and an inability to break out of the ruts created in the paths to development. The capacity to take in information, reflect on its meaning, test it against theory and practice,

and build new understanding and action implications is fundamental to effective development activity at many levels.

The emphasis of this analysis has been on *institutional* interventions, even though we began with the assumption that strengthening civil society required enhancing its material and intellectual bases as well as its organization base. ID interventions to reshape self-reproducing social orders and patterns may have important consequences for values, ideas and ideologies, for political and financial resources, and for the organizational arrangements that mobilize those resources in pursuit of values, ideas and ideologies. The emphasis in the interventions described has not been on narrow organizational matters. On the contrary, many of the ID interventions focus on building ideas and perspectives, on educating staff, volunteers and publics, on synthesizing interests and ideas across differences, and on developing new knowledge and strategies by learning from past experience.

The range of approaches to classify and elaborate ID interventions described above only deal within the context of a country. There are increasing evidences for growing trans-border networking and association of actors in civil society. Transcending the boundaries of the nation-state, various formations of consumer groups, cooperatives, women's movement, ecological movement, indigenous people's organizations, voluntary development NGOs and others have begun to evolve at sub-regional, regional and global levels. Some ID interventions aimed at *strengthening global civil society*, and promoting its engagement with global functions of governance and market are beginning to be practiced. These also need to be incorporated in our framework.

Finally, there is a need to pursue institutional development of ID itself. The theory and practice of ID in strengthening civil society is only beginning to get articulated. There is a need to promote greater documentation and analysis of practice on one hand, and greater innovation and experimentation in practice, on the other. The elaboration of theory, frameworks, principles, norms and professional standards in ID for strengthening civil society has to be deliberately undertaken by co-practitioners and peers in this field itself. We hope that this paper makes some contributions in that direction.

References and Notes

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THE AUTHORS

Dr. Rajesh Tandon is the President of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), a civil society organization based in India

L. David Brown is Lecturer in Public Policy and Associate Director for International Programs at the Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations. Prior to coming to Harvard he was President of the Institute for Development Research, a nonprofit center for development research and consultation, and Professor of Organizational Behavior at Boston University. His research and consulting has focused on institution building, particularly for civil society organizations and networks, that fosters sustainable development and social transformation.

Making democracy work for all

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Building on its perspective that *Knowledge Is Power*, PRIA's strategy comprises:

- Supporting enhancement of knowledge and capacities of citizens to become active
- Facilitating building of collectives and associations of citizens so that their voice is amplified
- Enabling civil society partnerships and alliances to work towards engaging governance institutions and structures
- Convening multi-stakeholder dialogues between citizens and governance institutions in the public and private spheres
- Advocating for policies, practices and procedures which support citizen participation and democratic governance

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1. *Enabling micro-macro and macro-micro linkages* that create strong support for influencing various actors. Therefore, PRIA works at the grass-roots level to evolve innovations that are scaled-up provincially, nationally and globally.
2. *Developing and nurturing relationships* with grassroots actors and systematising practical knowledge.
3. Promoting *capacity building* through distance education, structured events, field exposure, and information dissemination.
4. Undertaking trans-national initiatives based on the principles of *south-south cooperation*.

The intensive field programmes of PRIA are currently located in the states of Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Jharkhand and Rajasthan. In addition, through its network of partners, these interventions extend throughout India. PRIA is also involved in programmes in countries like Afghanistan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Nepal, Philippines and Sri Lanka. In addition, its global interventions in distance education, capacity building and global advocacy reach out to practitioners, professionals and policy-makers around the world.



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42, Tughlakabad Institutional Area, New Delhi - 110062 India

Ph: +91-011-29960931/32/33, Fax: +91-11-29955183, Email: info@pria.org, Web: www.pria.org

PRIA is an International Centre for Learning and Promotion of Participation and Democratic Governance