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Civil Society, Democratization, and Foreign Aid: Civic Engagement and Public Policy in South Africa and Uganda

MARK ROBINSON and STEVEN FRIEDMAN

Drawing on comparative research in South Africa and Uganda, this article examines how far civil society organizations influence government policy and legislation and extend citizen participation in public affairs. The article also considers how far external funding influences policy engagement and outcomes. The main finding is that few civil society organizations have either a consistent level of engagement in the policy process or make a significant difference to policy outcomes. The nature of internal governance practices in galvanizing citizens' voices and the relationship to the state and political parties are the most decisive factors in civil society organizations achieving policy influence. The article concludes that the capacity of civil society organizations to offer citizens a say in decisions and to enhance pluralism may be as important as their ability to influence policy and demand accountability from state actors.

Key words: civil society; public policy; democratization; foreign aid; Africa

Civil Society and Democratization

Civil society is widely believed to have the potential to make a positive contribution to democratization in Africa and other parts of the developing world. This assumption derives both from theoretical expectations of the democratic potential of organized associational activity and the actual role played by civil society organizations in democratic transitions in various countries over the past two decades.

Influenced by these ideas and events, foreign aid donors are increasingly aware of the role and potential of civil society in democratic transitions. This generates two critical issues arising from donor expectations of the potential of civil society to promote democratization. First, there is no consensus on the role that civil society is expected to play in strengthening democracy and so the reasons it should be supported by those seeking to build democracy are not self-evident. Second, despite the often unquestioned assumption that civil society organizations can play an important role in strengthening democracy, relatively little is known about their effectiveness and impact.

The research on which this article draws examines two aspects of the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in defending and broadening democracy. First,

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it considers their *internal governance* because this reflects the degree to which they are able to give citizens a voice in public debate – a primary function of a civil society organization. It is also important in determining whether civil society groups can speak for their constituents. Organizations may be very successful in influencing public policy but have a limited social base and may exhibit organizational practices that do not promote wider participation. Second, the research examines the *political efficacy* of CSOs their ability to influence public policy. The research also sought to determine how far foreign aid furthered or hindered the work of individual CSOs by influencing their mode of operation and ability to influence public policy and legislative agendas.

The analytical framework developed by Hadenius and Uggle offers a comprehensive approach for assessing the contribution of civil society organizations to democratization. Following the tenets of liberal theory, they argue that the democratizing potential of civil society organizations may be assessed along three main axes: their contribution to pluralism; their educational function; and political participation.

According to Hadenius and Uggle, the contribution of civil society organizations to pluralism can be evaluated on the basis of three criteria: a multiplicity of popular organizations providing a bulwark against authoritarianism and political oppression; a high degree of autonomy from the state reflected in the selection and accountability of an organization's leadership and the extent of participation in decision-making; and organizational diversity, allowing for a wide range of groups and interests to coalesce into networks and associations, and to provide a balance between contending power centres, interests, and opinions.

Hadenius and Uggle argue that the educational function of civil society inheres in the criteria of participation and accountability, which in turn strengthen democracy. Civil society organizations provide structures for inculcating democratic norms and consensus-building, provided they have a broad and voluntary membership and a leadership that is accountable and responsive. Second, a multi-layered organizational structure, characterized by small homogenous groups, sharing similar problems and resources, promotes transparency and accountability in associational life. Third, a broad popular base in different parts of a country where the majority of people reside strengthens the potential of civil society to contribute to democratic development.¹

A capacity to foster political participation is the third main attribute of civil society organizations in this framework. The character of an organization's internal structures is an important determinant of its ability to influence the public policy process and to establish productive relationships with other organizations. It follows that a participatory approach to decision-making and an open and accountable leadership are positively associated with political efficacy, namely, the ability of organizations to influence state policies.

These theoretical considerations form the basis for a core hypothesis: civil society organizations that are internally democratic and motivated by broader societal concerns (rather than narrow, self-interested, behaviour) can make a positive contribution to the process of democratization by fostering pluralism, promoting democratic values, and enhancing political participation. For the purpose of this article, civil

society's contribution to democracy is judged (a) on the degree to which civil society organizations are able to influence public policy and make office-holders accountable, and (b) the extent to which members or supporters of these organizations have participated in exercising influence or demanding accountability through them. A further hypothesis arises in relation to external assistance: foreign aid donors can strengthen the internal governance and political efficacy of civil society organizations by providing resources and exerting influence over the domestic policy environment.

This framework developed by Hadenius and Ugglä raises interesting issues for empirical testing. But some of its prescriptions are open to interrogation. Why is a high degree of autonomy necessary to influence state actors? Could autonomy not become a constraint on influence if it excessively distances organizations from government decision-makers? Why are civil society organizations with a voluntary membership and an accountable leadership assumed to contribute more effectively to democracy? Why is a 'multi-layered organizational structure, characterized by small homogenous groups' considered necessary to promote transparency and accountability in associations? Why is internal structure a determinant of influence? Surely hierarchical organizations can have as much influence as participatory democratic associations? This article engages with many of the issues raised by the framework – but is concerned to examine these within an approach which sees the effective expression of voice within organizations and in society as a key determinant of the democratic contribution of civil society organizations.

Civil Society, Foreign Aid, and Public Policy in South Africa and Uganda

These above questions formed the point of departure for comparative research which set out to analyse the impact of foreign aid on civil society organizations in South Africa and Uganda, exhibited in changes in their internal organization and their ability to influence government policy and legislation through advocacy, lobbying, and mobilization. On a wider canvas the research sought to determine the contribution that civil society is making to democratization, by broadening the opportunities available to citizens to participate in public affairs, promoting a culture of accountability, and in challenging the power of the state to dominate political affairs and decision-making.

South Africa and Uganda have experienced some form of authoritarian rule under civilian and military regimes respectively, and are now ruled by governments that have, to differing degrees, democratic features. For two decades Uganda was governed by the non-party Movement regime but held regular elections and accepted the right of independent CSOs to organize and engage in policy advocacy. In July 2005 a referendum in favour of multi-party democracy formally signalled a political transition though many of the political features and institutions of the Movement system remain in place. South Africa has, since 1994, been a multi-party democracy in which civil and political liberties are formally recognized. It is governed by the African National Congress (ANC), which has won three successive general elections by a wide margin. The ANC dominates the legislature and no credible challenger for

power has yet emerged. While the liberal democratic features of the South African system remain firmly in place, the ANC's electoral dominance means that the parliamentary opposition is weak and a largely ineffective source of government accountability.

The research consisted of two phases. The first entailed investigations into the nature and character of civil society organizations in the two countries, founded on analysis of the external and domestic policy environments based on survey questionnaires, interviews, and a review of secondary literature. The studies of the domestic policy environment examined the state, the political regime, and the economic policy context to ascertain how these factors shape the nature and functioning of CSOs. The analysis of the external policy environment, based on interviews with officials in leading aid donors and a review of relevant donor documentation, focused on the role of foreign aid donors, with a particular emphasis on democracy-assistance programmes and support for civil society.

At the core of the research are detailed case studies of 12 leading civil society organizations and their impact on public policy and legislation, which constituted the second phase of work (see Appendix).² Many of these organizations are considered by aid donors to play a leading role in processes of democratization and many receive a considerable proportion of their funds from foreign aid, especially in Uganda. All are formally constituted and many are legally registered with their respective governments. Most are 'peak associations' representing networks of organizations with a common purpose and membership. Three case study organizations in each country were selected to facilitate paired comparisons, namely, trade union federations, business associations, and women's organizations. The others were chosen for the insights they might reveal for particular types of organization and their capacity to contribute to democratization through governance work, protection of human rights, and promoting citizen voice.³

The six South African cases are:

- The South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO), a national organization seeking to representing township residents that was initially formed as a federation of civic organizations operating in black townships;
- The Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the country's largest national, membership-based, trade union federation;
- The Federation of African Business and Consumer Societies (FABCOS), a national federation of membership-based organizations representing black small businesses and consumers;
- The Women's National Coalition (WNC), a national coalition of women's organizations, including membership-based affiliates and activists of professional non-governmental organizations (NGOs);
- The Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA), a professional advocacy NGO which does not have a membership base but receives significant donor funding; and
- Two farmers' associations in North West Province, local membership-based rural organizations that do not receive donor funding.

The six Ugandan case studies are:

- The Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA), a national, membership-based, federation of Ugandan NGOs;
- The Uganda National Students Association (UNSA), a national membership-based association representing post-primary students, which does not receive direct donor funding but has relied on government funding that is wholly or partly derived from donors;
- The National Organization of Trade Unions (NOTU), a national, membership-based federation of Ugandan trade unions;
- The Uganda Manufacturers Association (UMA), a national, membership-based association representing private industrial and commercial firms;
- The National Association of Women Organisations in Uganda (NAWOU), a national, membership-based federation of Ugandan women's organizations; and
- The Human Rights Network (HURINET), a national, membership-based network of Ugandan human-rights groups.

The case research generated in-depth studies of the 12 organizations in South Africa and Uganda. The data were collected from detailed interviews and focus group discussions with leaders and members of civil society organizations, government officials, and key informants, participant observation of formal meetings and gatherings, and a review of documentation produced by each organization. The findings are analysed through the twin lenses of political efficacy and internal governance to determine the nature and extent of civil society influence on public policy and legislation and, where influence was exerted, the degree to which it contributed to giving citizens a voice in decision-making. The article further seeks to assess the impact of foreign aid on these outcomes, as a basis for framing generalizations concerning the contribution of civil society organizations to democratization in Africa and the attendant policy implications for foreign aid donors. In closing, it should be noted that research findings on the policy impact of civil society organizations should be treated with some element of caution, as these largely entail judgements based on the insights of policy insiders, and the process of policy formation and decision-making within the South African and Ugandan governments has yet to be comprehensively analysed.

Civil Society Organizations in South Africa and Uganda

Authoritarian and racially exclusive regimes in Uganda and South Africa have used constitutional provisions to control freedom of association and expression, inhibiting the functioning of civil society groups. However, with the transition to more democratic and inclusive forms of government, their constitutions have been revised to create an environment that is considered to be supportive of independent citizen action. Liberal constitutions, however, do not guarantee non-interference in the affairs of civil society groups by the state. For example, political parties were highly regulated under the Ugandan constitution and this limited the forms of

engagement available to civil society groups.⁴ Special statutory provisions, some of which have their origins in the colonial period, govern the activities of trade unions, cooperatives, and organizations representing lawyers and journalists.⁵ Both countries have registration requirements for civil society organizations, although these differ in the sanctions imposed for failing to register, including exclusion from the policy process, denial of foreign funding, and exemption from tax benefits. Registration may be an administrative formality – as in South Africa – whereas in Uganda it can be used to deny official recognition to organizations that are deemed overly critical of the government.⁶

Economic conditions influence the development of civil society, shaping the ability of independent organizations to attract financial support. In South Africa a large formal sector and a wealthy middle class provide congenial conditions for resourcing independent organizations outside the state. Conversely, in Uganda, the private sector, a potential source of indigenous philanthropy, is weak, exacerbating the dependence of civil society organizations on funds from government and overseas sources, which in turn undermines their accountability and credibility. Downsizing the state through structural adjustment has resulted in substantial public sector retrenchment in Uganda, drastically reducing the membership of public sector unions. The balance of power in civil society has changed as a result. Groups with a mass membership, such as trade unions, have lost influence while NGO intermediaries and business associations have grown in number and influence. At the same time, economic recovery has strengthened the private sector, providing organizational resources as business associations attract new members.

Civil Society and Policy Engagement

The ostensible purpose of donor aid to civil society in Africa is to broaden citizen engagement in public affairs.⁷ This is consistent with the widely held assumption that civil society organizations have the capacity and potential to participate in the public policy process through structured dialogue and consultation, advocacy and mobilization, as a means of deepening democracy and improving governance. In the process donors hope to improve the accountability of public officials and to broaden participation in the policy process.⁸ However, in spite of the pervasiveness of these assumptions in donor circles, their validity has not been subject to detailed scrutiny in the African context.

The research findings point to considerable variation in the form of policy engagement among civil society organizations in South Africa and Uganda depending on the domestic policy environment, their internal organizational capacity, and the availability of financial resources. A key finding is that while most civil society organizations acknowledge the importance of engaging in public policy, few demonstrate a consistent level of direct involvement in the policy process and fewer still have a significant impact on policy outcomes. The remainder of this section explores the significance of these findings in the South African and Ugandan contexts.

South Africa

The South African state provides formal channels for public participation in policy formulation, in both national and provincial government. At various stages of the legislative process there was, during the first post-apartheid administration, extensive public consultation on proposed bills through formal and informal processes in which civil society groups played a significant role. While there was a decline in structured engagement under the second post-apartheid administration, civil society organizations retain the right to seek to influence legislation through mandatory hearings convened by parliamentary committees, and civil society participation in policy processes remains significant. Formal consultative bodies, such as the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), offer opportunities for structured dialogue between representatives from government, business, unions, and NGOs on critical areas of public policy.⁹ Other approaches include lobbying, publications, and informal discussions with government officials. Public protest is also at times used to pursue civil society goals.

The majority of organizations surveyed in South Africa reported that their perceived impact on public policy was good or fair; few thought their impact was poor or non-existent. Perceptions of effectiveness are especially high among advocacy groups and organizations in receipt of foreign funding. The survey data indicate that organizations in possession of skilled personnel, financial security, and administrative capacity are more likely to be effective in influencing policy decisions, whereas those with funding problems have a low perceived impact on public policy.¹⁰

COSATU, the leading South African trade union federation with 1.8 million paid-up members, has achieved significant policy impact on behalf of its members. It is engaged in an alliance with the governing ANC but, particularly since 1999, has often differed from the governing party on policy issues. It participates in the public policy process through a variety of formal mechanisms such as NEDLAC and has a parliamentary office to monitor legislation and to facilitate consultations with parliamentary committees and engagement with departments and ministries. It is regularly consulted on new legislation, often in advance of other CSOs, and provides inputs into government policy documents.

Several factors explain COSATU's relative success in policy engagement with the ANC government. It has a strong internal democratic culture, with regular leadership elections and high levels of participation in internal union affairs. A large membership base enables COSATU to raise the bulk of its income from fees and investments, giving it a high level of autonomy and financial independence. It does not rely on income from government sources and only to a very limited degree from aid donors, though donor funding played a crucial role in establishing COSATU during the anti-apartheid struggle. Without this initial donor support the federation would not have been able to build the capacity to organize internally and interact with the state and society externally that was necessary for it to grow and expand.¹¹

As a formal ally of the ANC and the South African Communist Party, COSATU retains a high degree of legitimacy with the government. Even so, relations between COSATU and the ANC are often conflictual, because COSATU's strong structural

base in workplaces has given it the independence to criticize the government publicly where policies are perceived to be contrary to members' interests – or, indeed, those of the society.¹² COSATU is often a more effective opponent of government policy than the parliamentary opposition. However, its advantages do not always translate into effective policy influence. COSATU officials complain that the government is relatively impervious to their submissions on economic policy issues and that their influence on macro-economic policy has been very limited in the post-apartheid era. Its capacity to engage successfully in public policy remains constrained by a lack of technical capacity rather than by financial difficulties or lack of access, in marked contrast to other civil society organizations.¹³ At the same time its critics argue that COSATU involvement in structured consultation on economic policy matters through NEDLAC and parliamentary lobbying has reduced its role as a vehicle for worker voice because technocrats have assumed a more significant role in negotiations with government to the detriment of grass-roots mobilization and a more independent stance.¹⁴ Similarly, activists complain that members feel increasingly marginalized from decision-making, but this is in the context of an organization where levels of participation remain markedly higher than in other South African civil society organizations.¹⁵

IDASA, a professional advocacy organization without a membership base, has also been successful in achieving policy impact.¹⁶ While it is not itself a conduit for citizens' voices, its role as a promoter of democracy is meant to build circumstances in which citizens' voices can be better heard and can influence decisions. IDASA relies on donor funding for about 90 per cent of its income, with the balance raised from government and business and fees for services. Rooted in the anti-apartheid era when it sought to provide bridges between extra-parliamentary resistance and white power-holders in an attempt to stimulate a negotiated end to minority rule, IDASA's approach has changed to focus on strengthening democratic institutions through parliamentary monitoring and capacity-building for government officials and civil society organizations, especially at the local level. It periodically engages directly in advocacy and lobbying and issues publications that are critical of government policy. At times this approach brings it into direct conflict with government, which creates reluctance on the part of officials to cooperate, though it maintains close relations with selected government departments and parliamentary portfolio committees and some provincial legislatures. Its activities span budget analysis, the provision of polling data during elections, and monitoring of the national parliament, all of which contribute to strengthening democracy by increasing accountability and transparency in public affairs. For example, its seminal work on budget analysis contributed to a successful campaign to increase the size and scope of the Child Support Grant for low-income families and forced the government to adhere to its commitment to fund anti-retroviral treatment for people infected with HIV/AIDS.¹⁷ IDASA's experience suggests that the lack of a membership base or durable linkages with party or government officials do not prevent an organization from achieving sustained policy impact, provided that it has a high degree of organizational capacity and credibility.¹⁸

In sharp contrast to COSATU and IDASA, SANCO, FABCOS and the WNC have limited impact on government policy despite linkages to the ANC government, which

indicates that legitimacy in the eyes of government is not a substitute for sustained strategic engagement, a solid support base, and technical capacity. Despite its claim to speak for some 4,000 local branches, SANCO has had very little influence on public policy, even in areas where it can claim some expertise such as housing and local government.¹⁹ In the 1990s SANCO placed greater emphasis on nurturing ties with the ANC to provide the organization with leverage and access to government officials than on organizing and mobilizing its constituency. Many SANCO leaders were absorbed into the ANC and government structures, thereby creating a leadership vacuum and eroding independence at higher levels. Incorporation into the ANC's leadership structure compromised SANCO's ability to propose alternatives to government policy and to use its influence to take up local housing and service provision grievances. While SANCO's ability to engage in and influence government policy has been of marginal significance, affiliated civic organizations have had a significant impact at the local branch level by mobilizing voice. Several of the more active branches have been engaging with local authorities by forcing municipal officials to account to citizens, through exposure of corruption and fraud, and by dealing with problems of housing, service provision, and taxation. On this basis Heller and Ntlokankulu argue that SANCO's contribution to democracy is more readily apparent in its success in politicizing and mobilizing citizens in local townships rather than in its influence over government policy at the national level. This implies that its lack of efficacy is a result of a failure to translate grass-roots activity into a national organized presence in the policy debate.²⁰

The WNC, a federation of South African women's organizations, and FABCOS, an association of black business groups, were also found to have a marginal role in public policy, despite their perceived legitimacy with and support for the ANC-led government.²¹ Despite grass-roots demands for greater focus on basic needs, after 1994 the WNC focused on advocacy and lobbying, popularizing the women's charter and advancing women's interests in government and the national parliament.²² However, its tenuous support base, the absence of a strong strategic focus, its unwillingness to challenge the government, and lack of funds have blunted the ability of the WNC to play an effective independent role, and it has, consequently, had little impact in shaping policy and legislation on gender issues in the post-apartheid era. Nor has it managed to lobby the government over issues of greatest concern to poor black African women, centred on services and employment.²³

FABCOS is an alliance of black consumer and business groups that aims to contribute to black economic empowerment through affirmative action policies. Its goals are to provide services for its members and to influence government policy. Despite its uncritical support for the government and its participation in NEDLAC, it has had little impact on government policy. Although FABCOS claims to have successfully promoted black economic empowerment, the evidence suggests that its contribution has been modest and that its lobbying role is secondary to service provision. FABCOS favours an approach that can be typified as quiet lobbying through selective engagement with officials in national and provincial government responsible for trade, investment, and small and medium-sized enterprise development, rather than visible efforts to influence public policies that broaden citizen participation. For the

most part FABCOS has not been able to promote the interests of its members with sufficient vigour or champion the cause of black economic empowerment with any degree of success.²⁴

A rather different scenario is presented by the two farmers' organizations in North West Province. They focus their energy on accessing productive agricultural resources such as land, farm machinery, and extension services. But their success in achieving this is hampered by lack of organizational capacity, for differing reasons. One farmers' organization does not manage to access and distribute resources on an equitable basis to its members because it is embedded in top-down traditional authority structures with no internal democracy. Another, founded on the principle of organizing farmers to demand their rights, has proved unable to counter the cutbacks in farm input subsidies despite initial success in securing access to state land for its members.²⁵

The six South African cases demonstrate that some organizations – notably COSATU and IDASA – have considerable success in influencing public policy and legislation, but that others fail to have much impact despite their links with the ANC government. An alliance with government can facilitate access and provide legitimacy for some organizations; for others it can inhibit their autonomy and efficacy. COSATU's influence stems not only from its alliance with the ANC but from its ability to speak for a large, organized, membership. With the possible exception of SANCO at the local level, none of the organizations that fail to influence policy are able to mobilize a substantial constituency in their support. COSATU's internal governance also enables it to provide union members with a voice. Where organizations do have an active membership to which they could give a voice in public policy debates but are unable to do so, low organizational capacity, reflected in lack of internal accountability, limited technical skills, and uncertain funding appear to be significant explanations. IDASA's experience shows that organized membership is not the only route to influence.

Uganda

In Uganda the public policy process is far less institutionalized than in South Africa, in part because parliamentary democracy and the practice of public consultation have yet to take firm root; policy engagement mainly consists of contacting government officials on a sporadic and selective basis. All six organizations surveyed claimed some level of engagement in public policy issues, but few have registered demonstrable success in influencing outcomes.

The Uganda Manufacturers Association has the most effective policy impact of all Ugandan civil society organizations surveyed for this study. It has a specialized department responsible for lobbying, advocacy, and networking and employs four key approaches in its efforts to influence government policy: advocacy to change unfavourable policies or support those which it favours; consultations over government proposals, especially in relation to tax and the budget; participation in decision-making bodies with government; and representation in government bodies where UMA has a strategic interest, such as the Uganda Revenue Authority. It has regular access to government officials and makes submissions on draft legislation and budget proposals, largely because it espouses a reform agenda that is acceptable

to government and has the skills and technical expertise to develop well-researched policy options. It has successfully recommended changes or reductions in personal taxes, excise tariffs, and import duties, the administration of value-added tax, and the creation of a Tax Tribunal. A high degree of financial security derived from membership subscriptions and income-earning ventures further strengthens its successful involvement in policy dialogue.²⁶

By comparison, mass membership organizations such as NOTU and UNSA have not managed to exert much influence on public policy, partly on account of financial and administrative problems. NOTU, the Ugandan trade union federation, has sought to influence government policy and legislation through tripartite organs established by the government, union representatives in the national parliament, and by lobbying officials. It has not resorted to strike action or extra-legal methods. NOTU has had no visible impact on government policy and plays only a marginal role in legislation affecting workers by virtue of limited research and technical skills, financial constraints, and restricted access to information. Legislation governing privatization and retrenchment of public sector workers did not take union interests into account, and NOTU has not won its demand for minimum wage legislation.²⁷

UNSA, the national student body, mainly focuses on issues of concern to students in secondary and tertiary institutions, such as representation on school management boards or university councils, corruption, and student welfare. It depends on the government for resources or for the collection of subscription fees through schools and colleges. In the 1990s UNSA adopted an increasingly critical position on structural adjustment and cost-sharing measures in higher education but failed to mobilize students to counter government abolition of student allowances. Demonstrations by students have occasionally secured concessions or countered official decisions, but their influence over higher education policy has generally been negligible.²⁸

Human-rights groups and women's organizations have usually avoided a confrontational approach, preferring to air their concerns through seminars and workshops. HURINET, the Ugandan-human rights network, claims to be involved in advocacy and lobbying, citing its work on legislation on the prevention of terrorism and its campaign against the death penalty as examples, but its impact on human-rights policy and law has been limited. Its principal method of engagement with the state has been non-confrontational dialogue, and it concentrates on offering services to its members and seminars and workshops on issues such as civic education and the provision of legal aid. HURINET strives to maintain an independent position, and a cordial relationship with the government has insulated it from repression or negative retaliation, but accordingly it rarely takes a stance on controversial issues. As a result, it has not managed to address human-rights violations with any significant degree of success.²⁹

Similarly, NAWOU, the Ugandan women's network, has a department responsible for lobbying, advocacy, and networking based on an explicit mandate to act as a pressure group representing women's interests. Like its South African counterpart, NAWOU successfully campaigned for women to be effectively represented in the Constituent Assembly and to take part in debates on the new constitution as a means of ensuring that the final document would be gender-sensitive. It has, with

some success, lobbied MPs and officials over legislation affecting women, such as the Domestic Relations Bill, but has had less success in its campaign for a provision governing co-ownership of land by men and women in the Land Act.³⁰ Despite its lack of sustained policy influence, NAWOU has a fairly extensive reach and influence through its work with women's groups, which operate at a fairly localized level and have become more transparent and inclusive in their operations.³¹

NGOs are widely thought to play a key role in influencing policy and legislation and have been at the forefront of donor efforts to strengthen civil society's role in advocacy and lobbying for change.³² However, the experience of Uganda questions the validity of this assumption. Only five members of DENIVA, a network of several hundred indigenous voluntary organizations, claim to be involved in advocacy and lobbying. This indicates the low priority accorded to these activities by NGOs in Uganda, which mainly focus on poverty reduction and service provision. According to Bazaara, NGOs express interest in lobbying and advocacy not because they are deeply committed but because aid donors favour this approach.³³ DENIVA claims to represent the needs and concerns of the NGO sector to the government and meets officials regularly but has not registered any notable success in influencing legislation or policy affecting its members.

The next section seeks to determine the significance of internal governance and organizational capacity for influencing the contribution of civil society organizations to pluralism and democracy in South Africa and Uganda.

Organizational Capacity, Internal Governance, and Democratization

The framework developed by Hadenius and Uggle suggests that civil society's ability to contribute to pluralism and democracy is a function of three criteria: multiplicity, diversity, and autonomy.³⁴ In this conception civil society organizations provide structures for inculcating democratic norms and consensus-building if they have a broad and voluntary membership and a leadership that is accountable and responsive. Organizational practices that promote accountability, mitigate hierarchy, and encourage open recruitment and voluntary membership contribute to democracy. These contentions can be tested against the case study evidence from South Africa and Uganda.

Multiplicity of Organizations

It is often argued that organizational diversity, characterized by a balance between different power centres, interests, and opinions, is key to a healthy and politically effective civil society. But while the case studies show considerable diversity in activities, most civil society groups surveyed in South Africa and Uganda do not express the views of social constituencies. Most are NGOs engaged in welfare provision and service delivery rather than membership-based organizations with a strong grassroots constituency. Of these, groups engaged in governance work, protection of human rights, and democracy-promotion represent only a very small proportion of overall activity, whereas health, education, social welfare, and economic development are the primary spheres of activity for most civil society groups.

This is not necessarily a bar to a role in expressing citizen preferences; these organizations could articulate the demands of constituencies in their chosen field but tend not to do so.

Civil society organizations are also heavily concentrated in capital cities or towns, where most have their head offices, raising questions about the extent to which people living outside these areas enjoy a voice in decisions. In South Africa there is a much higher concentration of organizations in economically affluent or politically significant provinces. This reflects higher levels of education and economic activity, both of which are conducive to the growth and sustenance of civil society organizations.³⁵ Civil society organizations in rural areas are often informal self-help groups or peasant organizations, which, in the view of one important analyst, are usually founded on hierarchical patron–client relationships and locked into chieftaincy structures.³⁶ Civil society organizations are poorly represented where they are most needed – in rural areas with large concentrations of poverty and pervasive social and political exclusion.

It is also important to note that civil society organizations in Africa tend to mirror wider social cleavages, especially class, ethnicity, and gender.³⁷ The middle class plays a significant role in the civil society organizations that are most visible in the public arena.³⁸ In South Africa and Uganda most prominent CSOs working on human rights and governance issues are urban-based with a male-dominated leadership drawn mainly from the educated, English-speaking middle-class elites.³⁹ There is, however, an important difference between Uganda and South Africa in this regard. In Uganda, professional NGOs predominate whose ostensible mission is to promote democracy and governance by engaging with the state over public policy. As noted above, more established organizations with a mass membership base, such as trade unions and cooperatives, or ethnic associations, are far less visible and have much less influence. In South Africa, a far larger and more diversified domestic industrial base has ensured a much larger union movement representing the organized working class; COSATU's significant, albeit limited, influence is a consequence, and it ensures that the policy debate is not monopolized by the middle and business classes. But even in this context, civil society organizations which represent citizens with access to organizational resources – such as trade union members – predominate, ensuring that even a vigorous civil society remains largely closed to many who lack these resources.

It is, therefore, difficult to substantiate the claim that a well-developed civil society contributes to pluralism and provides a bulwark against authoritarianism simply by virtue of the existence of a multiplicity of civil society organizations. Much depends on the degree to which organizations seek to express citizens' interests and values, the extent to which participation is available to the widest possible range of citizens, including those whose interests and values may prompt them to oppose the mainstream view, and the degree to which organizations are able to influence policy.

Autonomy from the State

Autonomy from the state is often considered an intrinsic and desirable feature of civil society organizations. The case study evidence indicates that the relationship with the

state is complex and at times contradictory, depending as much on historical and political context as on organizational attributes. The state often seeks to inhibit the scope for effective independent action through political interference, co-option, and restrictive legislation. In both South Africa and Uganda, legislation and statutory codes govern the activities of civil society groups and delimit the range of activities in which they are engaged. But in South Africa the process is largely informal and voluntary whereas in Uganda it is mandatory and the failure to register has punitive implications.

It is important to distinguish between distance and autonomy. If autonomy is understood as distance from the state, the claim that it is essential if civil society organizations are to be effective in influencing the actions and decisions of state actors is not supported by the case study evidence. Organizations may sympathize with a political actor, and thus enjoy closeness to it and consequent influence, but remain autonomous because they continue to set their own priorities.

Autonomy from political actors is also thought to be a necessary attribute of civil society. But this issue is often not addressed with conceptual clarity. If autonomy is understood as the power and right to be accountable primarily to the social constituency the organization seeks, directly or indirectly, to represent, then it is an essential prerequisite to providing citizens with a voice. Thus, in non-democratic single-party regimes such as Uganda in the late 1960s, or under the Movement system in the 1990s, this autonomy was and is clearly an essential prerequisite to citizen participation through civil society organizations. Political parties have sought to control the activities of civil society groups when in government and have sponsored the formation of rival organizations to undermine opponents and advance their political agenda in the civil sphere: the National Resistance Movement in Uganda has sponsored the formation of youth and women's groups supportive of its cause. But autonomous organizations may also be close to governing parties because this is the preference of their leaders or constituencies.

The case study evidence suggests that engagement in political society, through links to political parties or representation in parliament, can offer distinct advantages and potential leverage. Key civil society organizations in South Africa have maintained close relationships with the ruling ANC and this has in some cases worked to their advantage in widening opportunities for policy dialogue. For example, COSATU's relationship with the ANC has been instrumental to its successes in policy engagement. Nor has proximity to the ANC compromised its autonomy or scope for independent action. Yet SANCO and the WNC, both of which have ties with the ANC, have by contrast been relatively unsuccessful in influencing policy. This suggests that proximity to government does not guarantee access and effectiveness in the absence of an organized social base that has an effective voice in the organization and the organizational capacity to turn its preferences into influence. But, if civil society organizations have an organized base, internal democratic processes and are committed to championing the interests of their constituents, proximity does not necessarily compromise independence or the expression of their members' views.

In Uganda trade unions have direct political representation in the national parliament through five seats allocated to workers' representatives under the aegis of NOTU. Although they have been able to exercise an independent voice and represent workers' interests in parliamentary debates, NOTU's ineffectiveness in influencing government policy stems from organizational and financial weaknesses, a passive interpretation of its central mandate to promote workers' rights, its opposition to central elements of government policy and, perhaps, the reality that its constituency – organized workers in the formal sector – is not numerically strong in the wider society. By comparison, the Uganda Manufacturers Association, representing business interests, does not have parliamentary representation, but has proven markedly more successful in influencing policy than its trade union counterpart, partly by virtue of its access to government decision-makers and its broadly sympathetic stance towards government policy.⁴⁰

A further dimension of organizational independence lies in financial autonomy. Most civil society groups that lack membership structures find it difficult to raise donations from the public, partly on account of limited societal wealth and a relatively small middle class, but also because of perceptions of political partisanship and limited public support for their activities. Financial problems afflict many organizations lacking access to government and donor finance, since lack of funds makes it more difficult to attract skilled personnel and build institutional capacity. For this reason, most civil society organizations have sought financial support from foreign aid donors and are highly dependent on this income. Membership-based organizations in Uganda, such as NOTU, NAWOU, and UNSA, raise some income from their members, though their ability to meet staff and administrative costs is limited. The UMA is unusual in that it raises the bulk of its resources from membership subscriptions and income from an annual trade fair, with only modest support from aid donors for specific capacity-building projects.

A contrasting picture emerges from South Africa, where many civil society organizations depend on internally generated resources. Church-based and membership-based welfare groups formed in the pre-apartheid era continue to receive the bulk of their income from membership fees and private donations.⁴¹ Of the six case study organizations, COSATU raises substantial income from union dues and investments, resulting in a high degree of financial independence. FABCOS, SANCO, and the WNC also mobilize the bulk of their income from membership subscriptions but are in a weaker financial position. In contrast, IDASA depends to a large extent on foreign contributions, even though it also receives government fees, since it does not have a membership base from which it can mobilize resources and its capacity to generate income from its activities is limited. It does, however, seek to reduce dependency by diversifying its funding sources. Financial security is a characteristic associated with those membership organizations that have had greatest impact on public policy. IDASA, which is effective but has no members, does have fairly secure resources even if these are raised from donors rather than members. But while an independent base of financial support confers legitimacy, it does not guarantee political efficacy. These issues are considered further in a later section of this article dealing with the impact of foreign aid.

Participation and Accountability

Liberal theorists claim political efficacy is at least partly a consequence of internal accountability. The research findings cast doubt on this claim, pointing to a less direct relationship between internal accountability and political efficacy. However, while members' voice does not necessarily translate into influence, it remains vital if civil society organizations are to contribute to the practical realization of democratic rights. The research reveals that all but one of the 12 civil society associations, federations, and networks in Uganda and South Africa are democratically constituted (the one exception, IDASA, has not rejected internal democracy but has no members and therefore no need for arrangements to give members a voice). In accordance with their constitutional provisions there are regular leadership elections and representation in decision-making bodies by affiliates. Most convene conferences or general assemblies for members and delegates at regular intervals. These, in principle, provide opportunities for internal debate and grassroots inputs into decision-making.

Membership-based organizations in South Africa were found to be more open and democratic and participatory in their internal governance than intermediary groups such as church bodies and trusts.⁴² Internal democracy is especially strong in the case of COSATU, whose annual congresses are characterized by very active involvement on the part of rank and file workers, who have considerable influence over decision-making and leadership elections.⁴³ However, in some organizations, formal democratic procedures are not always followed in practice. FABCOS, SANCO, and the WNC in South Africa have become hierarchical and bureaucratic with limited involvement by grassroots members in decision-making and, in some cases, the marginalization of local branches from national policy decisions, which has led to a reduction in internal democracy. NOTU in Uganda has not held leadership elections every five years as provided for in its constitution, partly because of military rule and civil war, but also because infrequent leadership elections and limited accountability have resulted in financial mismanagement and periodic embezzlement of funds.⁴⁴

In addition to democratic constitutions, mass memberships may be seen as conferring democratic legitimacy on civil society organizations. However, the evidence demonstrates that mass membership does not automatically guarantee representativeness. For instance, SANCO, the national civics organization in South Africa, claims a mass membership base but lacks democratic credentials, reflected in a hierarchical style of leadership, exclusionary practices, and close proximity to the ruling party, even though many local branches function in an open and participatory manner. And, besides the point that mass organizations may not be representative of their constituency, numbers must be translated into effectiveness if organizations are to give those for whom they speak a voice.

Even where they do not exert policy influence, the role of CSOs in providing citizens with an independent sphere of association in which they can participate and deliberate priorities is an important democratizing function in its own right, especially when the state is impervious to external influence and circumscribes opposition activity. However, this does not minimize the importance of political efficacy, which can ensure that members' voice is also translated into policy outcomes.

The Contribution and Impact of Foreign Aid

The effectiveness of civil society organizations in influencing policy and acting as agents of democratization is not only shaped by internal organizational factors but is conditioned in significant measure by the availability of resources. It is therefore vital to consider the impact reliance on foreign aid has had on the democratizing potential of civil society organizations.

The ability of most African civil society organizations to generate adequate funds from indigenous sources is generally constrained by relatively low levels of industrialization. In most low-income countries in Africa the middle classes lack the wealth and commitment to provide the resources for running costs through donations or structured fundraising efforts. Two organizations that mobilize the bulk of their income internally – UMA and COSATU – respectively have wealthy or large memberships from which they levy fees. Organizations that rely on membership subscriptions and community donations, such as trade unions, professional associations, and cultural and religious bodies, are relatively independent since few receive significant foreign funding, although most generate limited funds from these sources. South Africa is more of an exception in this regard since many organizations depend on internally generated resources, principally in the form of membership subscriptions, but even here international donors are the dominant funding source.

In the 1990s aid donors increasingly sought to work with civil society organizations in Africa to advance democracy and governance objectives, focusing on subjecting the state to greater citizen oversight, fostering political pluralism, and engaging in policy dialogue and advocacy.⁴⁵ The very high aid dependence of most civil society organizations in receipt of foreign funds potentially renders them vulnerable to changes in donor funding priorities that could compromise their autonomy.⁴⁶

While aid to civil society is not substantial, it is concentrated among a relatively small set of organizations perceived to have the potential to contribute to democratic development through engagement in public policy. These tend to be human-rights groups, NGO federations, women's organizations, business and professional associations, trade unions, think tanks, and the media.

Concentrating donor support in a highly select group of organizations skews the composition of civil society by promoting only those organizations able to meet donor application and reporting requirements. Donor funding priorities may also significantly influence the agendas, activities, and growth trajectories of organizations.⁴⁷ For example, the considerable infusion of donor funds from the mid 1980s into women's associations, human-rights groups, and advocacy organizations working on democracy and governance in South Africa and Uganda stimulated the formation of new organizations geared towards donor objectives.

For the purpose of this research, the critical question is the extent to which foreign aid has affected the capacity of groups to engage in the policy process. Contrary to expectations, the research findings suggest that the source of funding, whether internally generated or derived from external sources, does not seem to be a significant factor in explaining differential policy impact in South Africa. COSATU and

IDASA have both achieved successful policy impact even though the former derives its financial support largely from membership dues, and the latter from foreign donors and fees for services. Perhaps more significant is the stability and predictability of resources.

In Uganda, a high level of donor support for the Museveni regime and its reform agenda has precluded active encouragement of a democracy agenda. But foreign aid in South Africa did play a positive role in strengthening the capacity of civil society organizations to contribute to democracy, especially at critical political junctures. This is demonstrated by the very considerable financial support provided to trade unions (led by COSATU), churches, and NGOs that spearheaded the anti-apartheid struggle in the 1980s.⁴⁸ Sustained non-violent opposition by civil society organizations played a pivotal role in defeating the system when combined with external diplomatic and financial pressure. After the transition to majority rule official donors increasingly favoured professional non-membership based organizations working in partnership with government rather than those pursuing an advocacy approach or representing the interests of poor grassroots constituencies.

IDASA, by contrast, is a good example of an organization which receives 90 per cent of its funding from foreign sources but maintains a high degree of independence in framing agendas and determining its priorities, making a significant contribution to public policy. Its promotion of liberal democracy is an objective shared by its funders, and its willingness to work with the government conforms to the priorities of most aid donors. A high degree of consonance over broad goals is buttressed by a high level of donor trust both in its demonstrated capacity and internal procedures for ensuring financial accountability.⁴⁹

Several organizations received little by way of funding from foreign aid and have relied more on domestic sources, but with varying consequences for internal governance and political efficacy. FABCOS leveraged support from white corporations in the early years of its existence and gradually moved towards financial self-sufficiency through income from a private equity fund used to fund black business investments. Foreign aid was provided for specific projects and training and for office infrastructure and equipment, but it never became a dominant source of income and such support ended in 1998.⁵⁰

The Women's National Coalition presents a case in which lack of clarity on objectives and administrative weaknesses stymied donor funding, which had played a significant role in sustaining its activities at the outset. Foreign donors prefer to support networks and organizations working on clearly defined gender issues such as domestic violence, and the WNC's absence of a clear focus, low visibility, and inability to influence public policy have all consigned it to a marginal role in gender policy debates. While this has been compounded by the disinclination of donors to offer financial support, the conclusion that the lack of funding was a consequence rather than a cause of internal weakness is even clearer in this case than in SANCO's.⁵¹

Some civil society organizations receive no support from foreign donors and this can affect their capacity to make claims on the state and to act as conduits for effective participation on behalf of their members in the absence of other sources of income.

Certain organizations may not be eligible for donor support as they are not formally constituted or their activities do not conform to donor priorities. This is the case with the two farmers' organizations in North West Province, whose advocacy efforts are focused on leveraging basic services and agricultural inputs from the state, but with limited effectiveness. They differ in their internal practices, with one characterized by relations of dependence and patronage, the other seeking to advance transparency, equality, and the material conditions of its members.⁵² This demonstrates that there are democratically constituted grassroots organizations that could potentially benefit from an infusion of external support, although this approach can also be problematic if the only form of support on offer is funding.⁵³

Ugandan civil society organizations invariably depend to a far greater extent than their South African counterparts on foreign aid. Of the six organizations surveyed for this research only the Uganda Manufacturers Association raises the bulk of its resources from membership fees, as well as from income from an annual trade fair and training and consultancy services. The UMA does receive some grants from aid donors for business training and information projects rather than core operating expenses but these do not account for a significant share of its income and have little bearing on its core mandate and range of activities. Financial self-sufficiency and UMA's ability to pay the salaries of dedicated policy staff who have received training funded by foreign donors is undoubtedly a factor in its success in influencing policy and legislation. In contrast, NOTU is, unlike COSATU, unable to cover its operational costs. It has been forced to rely on foreign aid, which has fuelled ideological and factional divisions within the trade union movement and undermined NOTU's viability and independence.

HURINET depends on foreign aid for around 90 per cent of its income, and affiliate contributions barely cover 10 per cent of its budget. For the foreseeable future HURINET will depend on foreign aid. This is not considered problematic by the organization, despite the demands entailed in making grant applications, monitoring, and reporting. NAWOU is in a similar position, since it raises the bulk of its resources from foreign aid donors and only a modest amount from internal sources. Both recognize the advantages of secure long-term institutional support and the need to achieve a greater measure of self-sufficiency but have not been able to mobilize significant levels of income from fundraising efforts. However, their limited contribution to national policy debate is not explained by dependence on donor funds, but rather by organizational priorities centred on servicing members, and a government that actively discourages advocacy efforts centred on democratic reforms.

In sum, the case study evidence confirms that many organizations are heavily dependent on foreign aid but that this does not necessarily skew their agendas or compromise their objectives. Indeed, foreign aid can play a benign and supportive role in the political efficacy of recipient organizations, but only if organizations are able to make effective use of funding and the domestic environment is conducive to influence.

Equally, the influence of donor funding on the internal governance of organizations – and, therefore, on whether they offer their constituency a voice in decisions – is variable. In some cases, funding may have reduced pressures for internal

accountability and participation by setting priorities that constituencies have never endorsed, or by privileging modes of dealing with government that exclude the participation of constituents. But COSATU's experience shows that initial infusions of aid can assist organizations that are interested in using the funding to strengthen the participation of their members in the organization and in society. The effect of funding on internal governance seems to depend, therefore, on the degree to which organizations are committed to democratic governance and aware enough of their own priorities to know how to use funding to strengthen it in their organizations.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

A major finding from the research is that few civil society organizations have achieved significant policy impact – and that two of the three which have achieved impact are not dependent on donor funding: COSATU in South Africa and the Uganda Manufacturers Association. Both have managed to influence policy and legislation in their respective spheres of interest because of specific features of their organizational structure and relationship with their respective governments. Both mobilize the bulk of their operational expenses from membership subscriptions and draw very selectively on foreign aid. They also benefit from perceived legitimacy among government officials, either by virtue of historical factors or broad complementarity of objectives, which provides them with privileged access to the policy realm. Both organizations have specialized policy departments that conduct analysis, undertake advocacy and lobbying work, and represent their views in consultative forums, all of which provide the capacity required for exercising influence.

IDASA has also registered success in its policy engagement with government, but for somewhat different reasons. It does not have a membership base and relies heavily on support from aid donors, but has a high degree of organizational capacity, which enables it to conduct well-conceived and effective policy interventions. In contrast, donor-funded organizations in Uganda have been generally much less ineffective in their efforts to influence government policy and legislation.

Donor funding for civil society policy advocacy has not, therefore, made a major impact on civil society policy engagement in either country. This is not to insist that donors have had no impact on democratization at all – in some cases, as with initial support for COSATU or more general backing for the anti-apartheid movement, donors have had a beneficial impact.⁵⁴ But positive impact seems to occur where they are able to strengthen existing democratizing trends – attempts to create them seem destined to fail.

Mass membership does not appear to be an essential prerequisite for contributing to public policy, but it can generate resources that make effective lobbying and advocacy possible. Strong traditions of internal democracy are not essential prerequisites of political efficacy but they ensure the leadership accountability and membership involvement that are essential if organizations are to perform the prime democratic function of giving citizens a voice.

Close proximity to government can have contradictory effects. Where organizations seek to use it as a substitute for building independent capacity, it compromises

both their capacity to speak for members and the ability to influence government policy priorities, as the SANCO and FABCOS cases show. Where it becomes a resource used to pursue members' concerns, it can facilitate access and influence.

Our analysis points to three critical ingredients in successful policy engagement by civil society organizations: strong organizational capacity, a high degree of perceived legitimacy by the government, and adequate financial resources, whether derived from internal or external sources. Foreign aid is not the most critical determinant of successful policy engagement; the character of a particular organization and its specific relationship to the state are decisive. But resources do matter, since the least effective organizations in terms of policy engagement (NOTU in Uganda and SANCO in South Africa) are also the least well-endowed financially.

The studies demonstrate that the contribution made by civil society organizations to democracy is not only manifest in the extent of their ability to influence policy and legislation. If measured on the basis of this criterion alone their impact would be judged to be very minimal. But the evidence demonstrates that their contribution to democracy extends to their ability to foster participation and deliberation, to build leadership capacity and to nurture values of tolerance and consensus-building, all of which are a function of internal democratic practices. The capacity to offer citizens a say in decisions and to enhance pluralism may be as important as the ability to influence decision-making and demand accountability from state actors.⁵⁵ These findings question inflated expectations of the policy-influencing potential of civil society and highlight the mutually reinforcing dimensions of its contribution to democracy.

The research findings also have implications for the theoretical framework developed by Hadenius and Uggle that was employed as a point of departure for this study.⁵⁶ The framework relies on a liberal pluralist model, which assumes that all citizens enjoy the capacity to influence government decisions. But this assumes a set of liberal democratic institutions – free and fair elections, the freedom to participate in autonomous organizations outside the realm of the state, an elected legislature, an independent judiciary, and an accountable political executive – which are absent in a number of key respects in the countries under review.⁵⁷

The framework also seems to be over-prescriptive in its requirements for a civil society that strengthens democracy. It mandates particular strategies, such as the formation of networks and organizational forms – the insistence on a 'multi-layered' organization or having a presence in different parts of a country – which seem to be a matter of choice for particular organizations rather than a precondition for strengthening democracy. It is unclear why a plurality of organizations is considered necessary but a diversity of strategies and organizational forms is not. The framework seems to provide intellectual support for this approach, but without building a compelling argument in its defence.

Finally, the framework fails to stress what is surely the most important rationale for the formation of civil society organizations in a democracy – that they provide citizens with a voice in public policy debates. This seems more central than any other consideration. Citizen voice, and the potential to translate it into decisions if majority support can be secured, is both the defining feature of democracy and the means by which government is held accountable to citizens. In this framework, however, voice and

participation within organizations, although valued, are relegated to a form of civic education or an instrumental device – a means of securing greater influence.

Citizens do not join civil society organizations to be educated – they do so to influence decisions that affect them. Policy influence is thus important because citizens whose organizations influence policy have a greater voice in public affairs. But this does not mean that voice is simply a useful means to influence. Democratic principles require that influence be seen as a means to exercise voice, not that voice be seen as a means to influence. If it is agreed that voice and the right to participate are the central democratic principles, then democracy within organizations is essential because it allows members to influence policy demands or proposals; it is not simply a means to an end. And organizations are to be judged by whether they give citizens a voice, thus enabling democracy to work – other functions are subsidiary to that purpose.

The research findings also have implications for donor policy and practice. The problems of donor funding lead some commentators to conclude that foreign aid to civil society organizations has pernicious effects and should be curbed or terminated.⁵⁸ However, others argue that the potential contribution of civil society organizations to democracy in Africa would be negligible without donor funding in view of the limited sources of indigenous funding.⁵⁹ The challenge for aid policy is to determine the most appropriate forms of external support, to specify the conditions under which such assistance would be most effective, and to broaden the range of organizations in receipt of foreign aid. Such an approach would reduce excessive dependence on external resources, strengthen organizational capacity, and foster greater pluralism, all of which would have a positive bearing on political efficacy and potential to contribute to democracy.

The research has shown how a small number of urban-based intermediaries led by middle class elites command a disproportionate share of foreign aid resources. Many of these organizations exert a limited influence on public policy and do not make an enduring contribution to democracy through their activities. Donors should therefore review the range of civil society organizations targeted through democracy-assistance programmes to ensure that groups in rural or urban low-income areas and those with a mass membership also receive adequate support. This approach would strengthen organizations representing poorer groups and potentially increase the diversity of perspectives available within the democratic system. But this does not mean that increased support to grass-roots organizations would necessarily strengthen democracy, since many are exclusive in their membership (by gender and ethnicity), are not transparent in their internal affairs, and are not accountable to their members.

The research demonstrates that key donor assumptions about the effect of supporting civil society organizations are flawed and that such funding often does not have the desired effect. The finding that donor support can strengthen existing inclinations towards democratic internal governance or increase political efficacy, but that funding which has had this effect is a rarity, suggests that donors often lack the understanding of the organizations in their environment which would enable them to identify participatory and potentially effective organizations. Obviously, the more the capacity to develop this understanding is enhanced, the greater the potential effectiveness of such interventions. But since there may be inevitable limits to the degree to which donors

can identify complex dynamics in a foreign environment, this may also suggest a need for approaches allowing organizations interested in democratization to access sources of influence and support other than financial resources alone. Whatever approach is adopted, however, the criterion that support should foster citizen voice in organizations and in society is paramount.

This concern does not negate the importance of organizational capacity and political efficacy in organizations that can offer citizens a voice. Where organizations fit that description, aid donors could play a role in strengthening organizational capacity through a set of discrete measures and changes in funding practices. First, it would be advantageous to replace short-term project support with long-term programme grants and technical assistance designed to build organizational capacity by strengthening fundraising mechanisms, financial management systems, and internal governance.⁶⁰ This would provide financial security during periods of organizational growth and consolidation, reducing the need to invest scarce resources in soliciting funds on a project-by-project basis. Second, aid donors could provide specialized assistance aimed at strengthening capacity for policy analysis and advocacy, especially for organizations lacking these skills. Donors can also help to create opportunities for structured policy dialogue with government but must also support the democratic right of organizations to express their interests however they choose, within the law, perhaps through protest marches or public meetings. Third, problems of financial dependence, reduced legitimacy, and erosion of autonomy that arise from heavy reliance on foreign aid could be mitigated by the adoption of strategies designed to identify and institutionalize local sources of funding from membership dues, indigenous philanthropy, and internally generated sources of income. Fourth, aid donors should seek to promote a more supportive policy environment for civil society organizations by encouraging governments to remove restrictive controls and simplify registration procedures. Such measures would contribute to increased organizational capacity with a view to building political efficacy for a wider and more representative range of civil society organizations, with positive implications for strengthening democracy through autonomous civic action.

NOTES

1. A. Hadenius and F. Ugglä, 'Making Civil Society Work, Promoting Democratic Development: What Can States and Donors Do?' *World Development*, Vol. 24, No. 10 (1996), pp. 1621–39.
2. In addition, related research in Ghana throws light on the questions discussed here, but without detailed case studies of policy engagement. For details see E. Gyimah-Boadi and M. Oquaye, 'Civil Society and the Domestic Policy Environment in Ghana', *Research Report 7* (Accra: Centre for Democracy and Development, 2000). See also E. Gyimah-Boadi, M. Oquaye, and K. Drah, 'Civil Society Organizations and Ghanaian Democratization', *Research Report 6* (Accra: Centre for Democracy and Development, 2000) and J. Hearn, 'Foreign Political Aid, Democratization and Civil Society in Ghana in the 1990s', *Working Paper 5* (Accra: Centre for Democracy and Development, 2000).
3. Excluded from the case studies are informal, localized organizations and ethnic associations on the grounds that they are rarely targeted for democracy assistance by foreign aid donors or engage in policy advocacy, with the exception of the two farmers' organizations in South Africa.
4. J. Oloka-Onyango, 'Civil Society, Democratization and Foreign Donors in Contemporary Uganda: a Conceptual and Literature Review', *Working Paper 56* (Kampala: Centre for Basic Research, 2000).
5. J.-J. Barya, 'The State of Civil Society in Uganda: an Analysis of the Legal and Political-economic Aspects', *Working Paper 58* (Kampala: Centre for Basic Research, 2000).

6. J. Oloka-Onyango and J.-J. Barya, 'Civil Society and the Political Economy of Foreign Aid in Uganda', *Democratization*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1998), pp. 113–38.
7. G. Hansen, *Constituencies for Reform: Strategic Approaches for Donor-Funded Civil Advocacy Programs* (Washington DC: Center for Development Information and Evaluation, United States Agency for International Development, 1996).
8. A. Van Rooy and M. Robinson, 'Out of the Ivory Tower: Civil Society and the Aid System', in A. Van Rooy, *Civil Society and the Aid Industry* (London: Earthscan, 1998), pp. 31–70.
9. NEDLAC is a tripartite forum in which government, business and the trade unions bargain over economic policy. It also has a development chamber in which a 'community' constituency finds representation.
10. C. Kihato and T. Rapoo, 'An Independent Voice? A Survey of Civil Society Organisations in South Africa, Their Funding and their Influence over the Policy Process', *Research Report 67* (Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 1999).
11. S. Mackay and M. Mathoho, 'Worker Power: the Congress of South African Trade Unions and its Impact on Governance and Democracy', *Research Report 79* (Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 2001).
12. J. Maree, 'The COSATU Participatory Democratic Tradition and South Africa's New Parliament: Are They Reconcilable?' *African Affairs*, No. 97 (1998), pp. 21–51.
13. Mackay and Mathoho (note 11), pp. 23–6.
14. J. Cherry, 'Workers and Policy-making', in S. Buhlungu (ed.), *Trade Unions and Democracy: COSATU and Workers' Political Attitudes* (Johannesburg: HRSC Press, 2006), pp. 143–66.
15. *Ibid.*
16. C. Kabemba and S. Friedman, 'Partnership and its Problems: the Institute for Democracy in South Africa, Democratisation Strategy and Foreign Aid', *Research Report 81* (Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 2001).
17. S. Friedman, 'The Treatment Action Campaign and the Shift in State Policy on HIV/AIDS', unpublished paper prepared for a Ford Foundation project on 'Citizen Engagement and National Policy Change' (2006).
18. Kabemba and Friedman (note 16).
19. P. Heller and L. Ntlokankulu, 'A Civil Movement or a Movement of Civics? The South African National Civic Organisation in the Post-Apartheid Period', *Research Report 84* (Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 2001).
20. *Ibid.*
21. D. Gershater, 'Sisterhood of a Sort: the Women's National Coalition and the Role of Gender Identity in South African Civil Society', *Research Report 82* (Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 2001).
22. A.-M. Goetz and S. Hassim (eds), *No Shortcuts to Power: African Women in Politics and Policy-making* (London: Zed Books, 2003).
23. Gershater (note 21).
24. D. Hlophe, M. Mathoho, and M. Reitzes, 'The Business of Blackness: the Foundation of African Business and Consumer Services, Democracy and Donor Funding', *Research Report 83* (Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 2001).
25. M. Mathoho and T. Schmitz, 'Poverty, Civil Society and Patronage: a Study of Two Farmers' Associations in North West Province', *Research Report 80* (Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 2001).
26. Barya (note 5).
27. J.-J. Barya, 'Foreign Political Aid, Democratisation, and Civil Society in Uganda: a Study of NOTU and UMA, 1990–2001', mimeo (Kampala: Centre for Basic Research, 2001).
28. N. Bazaara, 'Civil Society and Democratisation Processes in Uganda: a Case Study of DENIVA and UNSA', mimeo (Kampala: Centre for Basic Research, 2003).
29. J. Oloka-Onyango, 'Cajoling the State: Analysing the Influence of NAWOU and HURINET on the Formulation of Government Policy', *Working Paper 83* (Kampala: Centre for Basic Research, 2003).
30. Goetz and Hassim (note 22).
31. Oloka-Onyango (note 29).
32. S. Lister and W. Nyamugasira, 'Design Contradictions in the "New Architecture of Aid"? Reflections from Uganda on the Role of Civil Society Organisations', *Development Policy Review*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (2003), pp. 93–106.
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APPENDIX: ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRIBUTES OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND UGANDA

	Membership size	Financial base	Internal governance	Organizational capacity	Political efficacy
<i>South Africa</i>					
South African National Civic Organization (SANCO)	4,000 branches	Membership fees	Regular leadership elections/ moderate accountability	Low	Low
Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)	1.8 million members	Membership fees, investments	Regular leadership elections/ high accountability	High	High
Foundation of African Business and Consumer Services (FABCOS)	N/A	Membership fees	Irregular elections/ low accountability	Low	Low
Women's National Coalition (WNC)	N/A	Membership fees	Irregular elections/ low accountability	Low	Low
Institute for Democracy in South Africa (IDASA)	None	Foreign aid	Board oversight/ high accountability	High	High
Farmers' associations in North West Province	N/A	Membership fees	No elections/ low accountability	Low	Low
<i>Uganda</i>					
Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA)	400 organizations	Foreign aid	Regular elections/ moderate accountability	Moderate	Low
Uganda National Students Association (UNSA)	N/A	Membership fees	Regular elections/ low accountability	Low	Low
National Organization of Trade Unions (NOTU)	19 affiliate unions	Membership fees, some foreign aid	Periodic elections/ moderate accountability	Low	Low
Uganda Manufacturers Association (UMA)	750 companies	Membership fees, some grants	Regular elections/ high accountability	High	High
National Association of Women Organizations in Uganda (NAWOU)	1,500 member organizations	Foreign aid, some membership fees	Regular elections/ high accountability	Moderate	Moderate
Human Rights Network (HURINET)	23 member organizations	Foreign aid, some membership fees	Regular elections/ high accountability	Moderate	Low

Source: Authors' field data and case studies.