



## CIVIL SOCIETY MOVEMENT IN GHANA: ENGAGING THE GOVERNMENT FOR IMPROVED POLITY

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### Abstract

The contemporary political milieu suggests that the socio-economic development of a nation does not wholly depend on the government alone. The crucial role which civil society organizations can play in this has been widely acknowledged. The emerging consensus posits that any nation which desires to exploit and utilize the potentials of the citizens for a broad based national development and effective governance, in the overall interest of the people must give due recognition to CSOs and provide them a free political and legal space to operate. This paper discovers that CSOs engagement with the government in Ghana to seek political concession and socio-economic reforms dated back to the colonial era when CSOs initiated and sustained the agitations that led to the country's independence. After political independence, CSOs in the country sustained their vibrancy to hold the new government accountable to the citizenry. Their struggle for social justice and political liberalization continued even all through the harsh political environment foisted on the country by incessant military interregnums. However, the emergence of the Fourth Republic has changed the fortune of CSOs and the friendly political environment which they enjoy now encourages them to complement the development efforts of the government and this has resulted in better polity in Ghana. The unrelenting oversight and complementary roles which CSOs have been playing to bridge the gap between the government and the citizenry is part of the reasons Ghana is portrayed as a beacon of democracy in Africa. The paper nonetheless identifies some factors which hinder the optimal performance of CSOs in Ghana and makes recommendations that would enhance their engagement with the government for better impact. Secondary source of data collection was used.

**Keywords:** Advocacy, Civil Society, Engagement, Democracy, Polity

### Introduction

Ghana has often been described as one of the few countries in Africa where a vibrant civil society with the latitude to freely interact with the government exist. The engagement of CSOs with the government to seek political concession, economic reform and social transformation in the country commenced right from the pre-independent period when organized associations and pressure groups such as traditional rulers, groups of professionals, youth associations and women associations were involved in shaping the colonial governance structure.

In 1897, the Aborigines Rights Protection was established in Goal Coast (now Ghana) to defend the interest of the indigenous people on the traditional land tenure system, against any possible encroachment by the British colonial authority (Gyimah-Boadi, 2008). In early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the market women demonstrated their distaste for colonial rule by openly and collectively protesting against the British imposed Warrant Chiefs and the Hut Tax of the colonial administrators particularly in Northern part of the country (WASCI, 2007).

Similarly, the Association of Cocoa Producers organised a protest in 1939 against the domination of cocoa market by the Association of West African merchants which was under the control of the expatriates (WASCI, 2007). At the end of the Second World War, the struggle for Ghana's independence became intensified with the emergence of more civil society groups such as farmers associations, trade unions, religious groups and other town associations which mounted serious pressure on the colonial government to liberate Ghana from the clutches of colonial domination. Consequently, the British Colonial Government initiated some constitutional reforms towards self government in the 1940s (OSJI, 2007). This development gave the Ghanaian educated elite a degree of political authority. In 1947 precisely, a group of intelligentsia established the United Goal Cost Convention (UGGC) which later engaged in an alliance with other civil society groups to form anti-colonial front. In early 1950s, the cocoa farmers objected to and protested against the cocoa price policy and other policies that were inimical to their business, (Whitfield, 2002). This, couple with the violent suppression of the Ex-Service Men Union protest by the colonial government, kept pressures mounting from various fronts to demand for the independence of Ghana. The British colonial government ultimately bowed to pressure and Ghana was granted independence in 1957.

This account espouses the fact that the Ghanaian's independence was not granted on a platter of gold. Rather, the struggle for freedom and justice that culminated in Ghanaian independence was initiated and carried out by civil society organizations, represented by various social and economic groups which stood against all colonial oppressions and victimizations to demand for the right of self determination (WASCI, 2007). This introduction sets the tone for this paper which focuses on the engagement of civil society organizations with the Ghanaian government since independence up until the present Fourth Republic experience. The main objective of this is to establish how vivacious or otherwise CSOs in Ghana have been over the years and to also determine the extent to which they have contributed to the socio-economic and political development of the country whose independence they conscientiously struggled for.

### ***Ghana and CSOs in immediate Post Independent Era***

Ghana's profile as an open liberal democratic order after its political independence was a mixture of success story, and that also affected the fortune of civil society in the country. (Brobbeey, 2011). In 1960, the nation adopted Republican constitution. Kwame Nkrumah who became the first executive president of the country decided to make Ghana a one party state. His vision of building a 'Socialist Society' in Ghana made him to attempt to co-opt all social groups into his Convention Peoples' Party (CPP) and through that silence all oppositions (Whitfield, 2002). In 1961, the CPP passed Industrial Relations Act. The Act, among other things, put all trade union movements under one umbrella called the Trade Union Congress (TUC) which was an ally of CPP. The Act made strike actions by workers illegal. It also required the most important posts in TUC to be filled by individuals with approval from CPP. Moreover, all women's organisations were abolished with the exemption of National Council of Ghana Women which was also co-opted by CPP. The youth were organised into the youth pioneers which became a wing of CPP too.

Given the importance of cocoa as a major source of revenue to the government, the government targeted cocoa trading as a main vehicle for political mobilisation and control. Thus, the CPP government created the 'United Ghana Farmers Council (UGFC). The government took this step as a bid to-; control the Cocoa Marketing Board fund, monopolise resources available to cocoa farmers and eliminate cocoa trading as a platform for organised opposition. Similarly, the government brought under its control other urban groups like the Ghana Legion and the Workers Brigade. The government of Nkrumah effectively silenced all oppositions and increased state control over civil society organisations including students' groups and youth association. Even the few civil organisations like the church and business groups which were not affiliated to the government party were denied free space to operate. All these crippled the ability of civil society to articulate public opinion or influence government decisions all through Nkrumah government.

Kwameh Nkrumah's government was terminated by a military coup in 1966. The military regime adopted some repressive means to keep all opposing and discordant voices in the 'cooler' (Amposah and Gyimah-Boadi, 2006). So the activities of civil society organisations appeared to be on the low ebb during the first military regime in Ghana (1966-1969).

Despite the unfriendly political environment, there were some social groups which dared all odds and consistently called for the liberalisation of the political arena and the return of power to civilian government. The military regime later bowed to pressure by planning a transition programme which culminated in handing over of power to another civilian administration in 1969.

Like its predecessors, the government of 'The Popular Party' which came into power after the 1969 usually reacted in a violent way to the activities of civil society organisations, especially any criticism of the government policy ( Amponsah and Gyimah-Boadi, 2006). The government headed by Dr. K.A Busia had a penchant for suppressing students demonstrations, quelling workers strike, gagging the press, and using armed forces to detain opponents of his government. Hence, not too long from its inception, the social forces which supported the emergence of the government started to express some discontentment about the performance of the ruling elite. In 1972, Busia government was terminated by another military coup d'état which produced Colonel Acheampong as the new military head of state.

As expected, Acheampong regime, like the previous governments, tried all available means to gag all opposing voices. But this did not deter some CSOs which defied all repressive measures, and kept on protesting against the occupation of Ghana's political space by another military regime. CSOs like the Urban Elites and some communal and mass bases mounted serious pressure on the government to make some changes in its policies. In response to the series of protests against his regime, Col. Acheampong announced a 'Union Government' (Unigov) in 1976. This was an arrangement in which social groups, the police and the military would share power on non partisan basis. The main idea behind the arrangement was to make civil society groups abandon their protests and be co-opted into the government. While some civil groups like the Kumasi Youngsters Club, Ghana Peace and solidarity Council, Muslim Representative Council, and Ghana Cooperative Council swallowed the bait and mobilised in support of the unigov. Other CSO such as the Ghana Bar Association and the Association of Recognised Professional Bodies (ARPB) refused to be co-opted. The opposition groups formed three major organisations; The People's Movement for Freedom and Justice, the Prevention of Dictatorship and the Third Force. All of them continued to pressurise the military regime to adopt some reforms, particularly those that would lead to the resuscitation of multiparty constitutional rule as an alternative to unigov (Gyimah-Boadi, 2008).

In July 1978, Akuffo replaced Acheampong through another coup and instituted Supreme Military Council (SMC) II. He stated his intention to return power to a temporary civilian government which would oversee the drafting of a constitution. But in 1979, the Army Force ruling Council led by Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings seized power through another coup d'état and returned the country to civilian administration the same year (Whitfield, 2002). The new civilian government was formed by the People's National Party, led by Dr. Hilla Limann. However, the new government was accused of class bias and its inability to arrest the parlous state of the country's economy. Ghana's political and economic crises continued on a downward slope during Limann's administration. Moreover, political parties were unable to articulate the interest of the people, the balance of payment deficit and inflation were soaring, while public services like health, education and roads were in Shambles. All these provoked agitations from civil society groups like the students, intellectuals and workers to demand for better socio-economic performance (Hansen, 1987). The widespread discontentment which greeted Limann's administration encouraged Jerry Rawlings to stage another coup which brought him to power again in 1982.

### ***Civil Society Movement during Rawlings Transition Programme***

During the early years of his regime, Rawlings tried several means to clamp down on CSOs and other independent bodies which he viewed as potential threat to his regime. (Hutchful, 2002). In a bid to revamp the parlous economic situation of Ghana, Rawlings regime embarked on Economic Recovery Programme, (ERP) based on the principles of Structural Adjustment. But the ERP came with its concomitant negative effects which increased the number of impoverish people in Ghana by the day. Donor organisations such as the World Bank, the United Nations and bilateral donors came up with a scheme referred to as "Programme of Action to Mitigate the Social Cost of Adjustment (PAMSCAD)" in 1987. They contributed US\$80 million for poverty alleviation and requested the involvement of CSOs in service delivery since the government did not have the institutional capacity to implement such a huge programme. Thus, CSOs used donors' funds to provide public services just like government agencies in areas such as micro-credit, education and training, provision of water, primary health care delivery, food security, women empowerment and income generation activities. With this development, the Rawlings regime had no choice but to encourage CSOs to fill the service delivery gap (Whitfield, 2002). .

Towards the tail end of the 1980s, Rawlings resuscitated his repression of opposition and autonomous organizations. That action, coupled with the long period of ban which his regime placed on political activities, led to the suspicion in some quarters that Rawlings was not willing to return the country to civilian administration.

But the wind of democracy blowing across the globe at the dawn of 1990s did not spare Ghana. The pro-democracy CSOs which grew in their large number put substantial pressure on Rawlings' regime to open up the political space and allow democratic participation. (Abdulahi, 2009). The pro-democracy groups which represented several groups and agenda formed opposition against Rawlings. In August 1990, the opposition groups formed the Movement for Freedom and Justice (MFJ). The Movement comprised of Ghana Bar Association (GBA), National Union of Ghanaian Students (NUGS), Trade Union Congress (TUC), Catholic Bishop Conference and the Christian Council. The objectives of the group included:-

- Restoration of multi-party democracy and civil rule in Ghana
- Fighting for the recognition and the realisation of the fundamental human and democratic rights of the people of Ghana to decide how they shall be governed.
- Upholding and defending the democratic and human rights of the people including the freedom of expression, especially of the press, freedom of association, freedom of worship, universal adult suffrage and the rule of law

The government responded to the agitation of MFJ by harassing, molesting and even raiding the homes of some key members of the movement. While some of them were declared wanted and forced into exile, those of them that remained in Ghana continued to carry out underground operation in the country (MFJ Report, 1996). The approval which their activities received from the Western countries and the covert sympathy they received from some members of the Army and Police Forces in the country made their voice become louder. Consequently, the PNDC organised a transition programme and metamorphosed into National Democratic Party (NDP) under which the incumbent head of state then, Jerry Rawlings, contested the 1992 general elections and won.

#### ***Civil Society Organisations in Ghana's Fourth Republic***

The transition to civilian administration in 1992 marked the commencement of the ongoing Fourth Republic in Ghana. It is pertinent to know however, that the transition to civil rule did not make CSOs in Ghana to go to sleep. Rather, they have waxed stronger and increased the tempo of their struggle to ensure that the democratic experience is yielding its dividend even to the ordinary Ghanaians. More so, the 1992 constitution has given them more latitude to operate in a conducive political environment (Abdulahi, 2009). The constitution guarantee freedom of speech and expression, freedom of thought, freedom of association, freedom to information and freedom of movement among others. Apart from the freedoms, Article 37 of the 1992 constitution compels the state to make law that would guarantee the enjoyment of the rights of access to agencies and officials of the state. It also guarantees freedom of people to form organisations or associations to engage in self help projects and the freedom to raise funds to support these activities. All these were reinforced by the abrogation of criminal libel and sedition laws in 2001 (USAID, 2010). The removal of these obstacles cleared the coast for the activities of a plethora of civil society organisations which emerged in post-transition Ghana to achieve the following objectives:- (a) representing and defending the course of the down trodden citizens of Ghana, (b) mobilizing the citizens for political participation and involvement in governance (C) building the capacities of government agencies for effective performance, (d) collaborating with the government to strengthen Ghana's democracy, (e) complimenting the development efforts of the government with a view to making life bearable for all Ghanaians, and (f) making Ghana a better society among other objectives. The next section of this paper will discuss some of the activities of CSOs in regard with the stated objectives.

#### ***Advocacy for Transparent Budget***

The budget serves as an important instrumentality by which the government allocates funds that would deliver services to the people. Knowing the significance of the involvement of the citizens and communities in the budget process, some CSOs in Ghana made significant efforts to get involved in the budget process and to educate and mobilize the masses to be concerned in shaping the budget as well. These efforts were meant to ensure that the budget address the needs of the poor, marginalised, disadvantaged and disabled people. The activities of CSOs in this regard included, simplifying the budget, deepening debate on it, collating, synthesising and disseminating budget information, engaging in independent critical analysis of budget and budget tracking (Anaman, Impraim and Olkyere, 2011).

The Institute of Democratic Governance (IDEG), the 'Peasant Farmers Association of Ghana (PFAG) and the Integrated Social Development Center (ISODEC) were some of the CSOs that engaged in budget process in Ghana. IDEG organised workshops to educate the people about the importance of their involvement in the budget process. The PFAG travelled round the country to educate farmers about the national government budget process and to encourage them to submit proposals on budget imputes to the Ministry of Finance and Economic planning for consideration. It is on record that the efforts of PFAG gingered the government to make provision for the Youth Empowerment Programme in 2007 national budget (ISODEC 2012). In addition, CSOs in Ghana campaigned for the preparation and presentation of the national government budget in a layman's language that would easily be understood by the people. This, they claimed, would enable the average citizens to be adequately informed on the major content and policies of the national government budget.

Consequent upon the efforts of CSOs on budget issue, Ghanaians are involved in budget analysis through two major approaches; ex-ante and ex-post. Ex-ante approach enabled the stakeholders to present their views to the relevant authorities to be included in the budget, while the ex-post approach gave the citizens the opportunity to carry out an assessment of the degree to which the budget succeeded in achieving the goals of the government and the society in general. These efforts in some way bridged the gap between the government and the people because the people feel fulfilled that their views count in this very important aspect of public policy.

### ***Poverty Alleviation***

Civil society organizations in Ghana worked closely with the government agencies to influence public policy on poverty. The interactions of CSOs with the rural communities usually give them the knowledge of the kind of poverty alleviation programme that may be effective in a particular community and how the programme could be implemented. This usually formed the basis of their advice to the government. For instance, the Civil Society Coalition on Land (CICOL) engaged the Ministry of Land and Natural Resources over the revision of the National Land Act and Ghana Land Administration Project in order to make them reflect the interest of the poor people in Ghana

In the same vein, the Social Enterprise Development Foundation constantly interacted with the relevant parliamentary committees and government Ministry to influence government policies and advocate economic programmes that would reduce poverty particularly, in the local areas. Given the advocacy of CSOs in Ghana on poverty alleviation, the government of Ghana often sought their expertise advice on poverty alleviation projects. Sometimes too, the government brought them on board and provided funds for them to help in the execution of poverty alleviation programmes. For example, the Ghanaian government made a serious effort to get the imputes of the CSOs while preparing the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) I and II. The involvement of CSOs was meant to increase their ownership of the scheme, enhance the accountability and transparency of the government, increase effectiveness of implementation, and strengthen the civil society (Chene, 2011).

Aside these, some CSOs in Ghana were directly involved in initiating and funding projects aimed at poverty reduction, employment generation and provision of vocational and health services to the masses. Some of them also engaged in construction of school building, provision of feeding in school, drilling of boreholes to provide alternative to stream water and provision of sanitary facilities in form of public toilet. They also provided microfinance to boost the trading activities of the women in areas such as Tamale and Savelugu in Northern Ghana. They reached the local communities with these services to fill up the vacuum created by the government's inability to fulfill this social obligation (CIVICUS, 2014).

### ***Influencing Public Policy Through Parliamentary Bills***

The passage of Bills by the parliament is one of the ways through which the government formulate policies which affect the lives of the people. The efforts of CSOs in this respect have contributed to making Ghana a better society. For example, the whistle Blower Bill was initiated by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) in 2002 and passed on to the Ghanaian Cabinet. The cabinet adopted the bill and forwarded it to the parliament which passed it into law in 2008. Other Bills which emanated from IEA were the Public Funding of Political Parties Bill and the Presidential Transition Bill. The Presidential Transition Bill was meant to regulate the process of transition from one government to another in order to put an end to the acrimonies and bitterness that characterised previous transitions in the country. The Bill was signed into law by the then incumbent president; Atta Mill on 31 May 2012 and barely two months after, precisely, 24<sup>th</sup> July 2012 Atta Mill died and John Mahanna, who was the Vice President then was immediately sworn in as the new President without any rancor (IEA, 2012). The instant seamless transition spurred many political observers to describe Ghana as a symbol of hope for democracy

in Africa. The Disability and Mental Act Bill which got the parliament nod in 2006 and the Domestic Violent Act which was passed into law in 2007 were also initiated by CSOs in Ghana.

Similarly, Family Planning was added to the National Health Insurance Bill through the long but persistent advocacy of CSOs. The Center for Democratic Development (CDD) and other CSOs formed a coalition which played a very prominent role in conceptualization of and facilitation of the National Reconciliation Commission Bill. Before the second reading of the Bill in Parliament, the coalition carried out a technical review of the Bill and after the passage of the Act the coalition also gave it a wide publicity (CIVICUS, 2014).

Similarly, the Right to Information Bill was presented to the Ghanaian Parliament by the executive arm of government on February 5, 2010. After the presentation of the bill to the Parliament, many CSOs coordinated by the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI), formed a Coalition on the Right to Information. The main responsibility of the coalition's was to facilitate the passage of the Bill and educate the people on the way it could serve as an anti corruption instrument. The coalition undertook series of campaigns and projects such as organizing workshops for MPs and other civil society groups, engaging in radio and television programme to enlighten people on the Bill and mounting pressure on the legislature to pass it. Unfortunately, the Bill has encountered series of hiccoughs at the parliament and it has not been passed into law as at the time of collating data for this research. Although, in February 2017, the Ghanaian Vice President Dr. Mahamudu Bawumia promised that the Bill would be passed into law before the end of 2017 (Bawumia, 2017)

### ***Educational Reform***

Furthermore, the advocacy of CSOs in the field of education has had a tremendous influence on education policy in Ghana. For instance, the addition of kindergarten level education to basic school education, the creation of the University of Education to train professional teachers and the establishment of the Ghana Education Service as a different entity from the civil service resulted from the serious advocacy work done by the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) which is also a civil society group. Similarly, the National Union of Polytechnic Students was invited to take part in the designing of the current Polytechnic Act 245 which has reshaped and strengthened the mandate of polytechnic education in the country. The national government usually extended invitation to some CSOs to take part in the education sector's annual meeting.

### ***Strengthening the Capacities of Government Agencies***

The Parliamentary Centre (PC) is a Ghana based civil society organization which organizes training programmes for Members of the Parliament in Ghana and other West African countries in order to enhance their capacity. Through a designed project called 'Financial Scrutiny', the PC trained the members of the Public Account Committee of the Ghanaian parliament to improve their knowledge of public financial management and scrutiny of the evidence produced by the Auditor- General. The engagement of the PC with the Ghanaian parliament led to the establishment of the 'Parliamentary Budget Office (PBO)' with the function of engaging in thorough financial analysis. The PC also facilitated the study visit of the members of Finance Committee of the Parliament to the House of Common in Canada and New York for them to have a first hand training on the importance of the Parliamentary Budget Office in ensuring accountability (Parliamentary Center,2009)

Furthermore, the discovery of oil (in commercial quantity) in Ghana in 2007 created the fears that oil wealth might become a curse to Ghana like many other oil producing countries in Africa. As a way of avoiding this scenario in Ghana, some CSOs formed a platform on Oil and Gas in order to work towards ensuring transparency and accountability in the oil industry and the management of the expected oil revenue (Gyimah-Boadi, 2012). This effort led to the working relationship between civil society groups and the Ghanaian Parliament. The partnership led to the drafting of the 'Petroleum Revenue Management Bill' and the 'Local Content Bill' which were both passed into laws in 2010. The success recorded by civil society on this issue was attested to by a former Ghanaian Deputy Minister of Energy and Mines, Inusa Fuseini, who remarked that '*the activities of civil society has been guiding the government action and the government has always desired to ensure transparency and accountability in the oil sector*' (Ezeala, 2011).

In the same vein, the Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF) constantly organised training programmes to build the capacity of the Judicial Service Commission. The Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) too provided training for government institutions such as the judiciary and the media in order to enhance their capabilities. These capacity building has gone a long way to enhance the effective performance of the public officers in Ghana.

The positive influence of CSOs in Ghana has also been recorded on several other issues such as transparency, electoral process, human rights and constitutional amendment. All these are a clear indication of the fact that the crucial role which CSOs can play in promoting the socio-political growth of a country cannot be dismissed with a wave of the hand. One cannot overemphasise the fact that the issues analysed above are undoubtedly contributory factors to the reason why Ghana is now regarded as a symbol of democracy in Africa.

It is essential to state at this juncture that this paper is not giving the impression that all is well with CSOs in Ghana or in their relationship with the government of the country. CSOs confront some serious challenges which hinder or limit the effective performance of their activities.

### ***Challenges of CSOs***

Some civil society groups take the position of ruthless opposition to the government and they lack the manner of communicating their agenda to the government in a straight forward, clear and unambiguous manner. This stance occasionally makes dialogue impossible. The main objective of CSOs is to influence the government positively on behalf of the masses and this is a job that can not be done by civil society alone. It requires mutual understanding between the government and CSOs. Even if the course being pursued by CSOs is at variance with what the government is favourably disposed to, they can bring their expertise knowledge to bear and find a way of reaching a compromise with the government. CSOs need to know that their work is to complement and not to supplement the government programmes.

It has been observed that some CSOs in Ghana lack the capacity to embark on empirical research such that would enable them to come up with practical evidence which will put them at a vantage position to offer credible alternative to the government.

Another hindrance to the influence of CSOs on the government is that many of the CSOs concentrate on provision of services rather than advocacy for policy influence. A CIVICUS report shows that 80 percent of CSOs in Ghana work as service providers. The implication of this is that issues of public concern like Civil Service efficiency receives less attention.

Lack of funding is another challenge of civil society in Ghana .the government does not fund CSOs, therefore, they depend on donors fund which they compete for. This often makes cooperation or coalition building difficult. Competition leads to duplication of efforts and a sheer waste of resources and time. CSOs are not likely to achieve harmonization when competition among them is seen as zero-sum game. Hence, the government sometimes sees them as an incoherent arena which pursues different agenda rather than speak with one voice.

Some CSOs in Ghana are very weak and lack legitimacy. Such CSOs have been alleged for existing for the purpose of making profit since they only operate to attract donors' funds without much activity.

### **Conclusion**

This research has discussed the engagement of civil society organisations with the government in Ghana right from the colonial period. It elucidated the fact that CSOs in Ghana has gone through oppression, suppression and emasculation (especially under military regimes) which are capable of making them to fizzle out but for their resilience. They have struggled for better polity in Ghana through activities such as demanding for the liberalization of the political space, asking for concessions from the government on behalf of the masses, requesting for accountability from public officials, mobilizing the people for policy engagement, participating with the government at various stages of policy formation, initiating ideas which were adopted and translated to policies by the government and boosting the capacity of state institutions among other things. These engagements have, to a large extent resulted in mutual understanding and made the government of Ghana to accept CSOs as indispensable partners in the task of building the state.

The government now acknowledges the expertise of civil society organizations on some issues like poverty alleviation and delegates such duties to them. In other words, the relationship between the government and CSOs has now graduated from being hostile and confrontational, as the case was in the 1970s and 1980s, to one of cooperation and mutual understanding. Moreover, the perception of civil society as puppets of foreign government through the umbilical cord of donor funding has changed as many civil groups are now recognised by both the government and citizens as dependable 'think tanks, research institutions, community organisers and human rights advocates. Civil society activities in Ghana

have now been linking citizens to the government through formal and informal bridging mechanisms, as well as bonding citizens to one another (WASCI, 2007).

Ghana as a country has benefited a lot from this mutual relationship. Undoubtedly, the reference being made to Ghana now as the beacon of democracy in Africa is not unconnected with the vibrant watchdog and advocacy functions of the Ghanaian CSOs. This is an experience which other African countries, where there is no love lost between the government and CSOs can learn from. The paper also includes some challenges which negatively impact on the relationship between CSOs and the government and by extension inhibit the performance of CSOs as well. Finally, the paper recommends that due attention should be given to addressing the challenges for optimal performance of the advocacy and oversight functions of CSOs. It also calls on the Ghanaian government to repose more trust in the CSOs as equal partners in the quest to move Ghana democracy to the next level.

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