

Perspectives on the Constituency  
Building and Accountability of CSOs:  
Missed Opportunities and The Way  
Forward in Transitional States

Sketch for Discussion Bangalore Leadership Forum  
Sep, 2019

# Context

**POLITICAL:** Diverse Interests (mainly parochial & disconnected) with historical grievances vs Nation-building and Democratization; Conflicts (ethnic based) vs Governance and Rule of law; Gender-based violence and inequities vs. robust Top-down Empowerment; Corruption and criminal HR abuses vs Accountability, Justice & Reconciliation

**ECONOMY & CLIMATE:** Backward Agrarian and Pastoralist Economy vs Manufacturing; Huge Unemployment with pervasive corruption vs State-driven inefficient Growth; All on the background of desertification, draught, poor infrastructure, double-digit inflation, etc.

# Context...

**DEMOGRAPHY & EPIDEMIOLOGY:** Expanding young population with rise in life expectancy and huge illiteracy; IDPs and immigrants; double burden of communicable and non-communicable diseases

**TECHNO:** Analogue and manual to digital and automated

# Ethiopia: State vs Civil Society: 1960s

- Informal local associations have been there for ages
- Civil Code to govern all voluntary organizations (the law of associations ) was issued in 1960,
- By the latter part of the 1960s - a small number of professional associations registered with the Ministry of Interior
- As a formal entity (NGO, CSO) the voluntary sector goes back only to the last years of the Imperial regime.

# Ethiopia: State vs Civil Society: 1970s and 80s

- 70s and 80s witnessed the two growth spurts of CSOs/NGOs enforced by the two famines
- Red Cross and Save The children Sweden were among the oldest NGOs
- Christian Relief Fund, later called CRDA, now CCRDA, was formed as an umbrella organization in 1973
- Transition from relief to rehabilitation and Development happened under the watchful eyes of military regime

# Ethiopia: State vs Civil Society: Mid to late 1990s

- Quantitative and Qualitative Explosion
- Growth in the numerical strength of the sector as a whole.
- Growth in the strength and activism of local or national organizations
- Beyond relief and development: human rights, governance and advocacy programs, women's rights, voter education, environmental advocacy, and public policy investigation and monitoring activities
- Relative decline of international NGOs

# Ethiopia: State vs Civil Society: Turn of the Century

- The Elites of Political Opposition in Ethiopia have worked for or are associated with or are supported by NGOs
- The HRBA language shares visible territory with the opposition 'manifesto' – complementarity of messages
- NGOs control significant resource (foreign currency) – bigger than the coffee revenue – and AUDIENCE
- Part of “the 4 walls of the fence” (laws enacted on Press, Political Parties and Terrorism)

# Ethiopia: State vs Civil Society: Turn of the Century

- NGOs are not CSOs
- There is pervasive 'policy rent seeking' within the NGO sector
- NGOs are agents of neoliberal ideology
- Huge operation cost
- Poor Accountability and Transparency (Little/No constituency base; many are 'MoNGOs', 'FoNGOs' or 'GoNGOs')
- Internal Brain-drain
- Some harbour and/or nurture extremism/terrorism



# Ethiopia: State vs Civil Society: Turn of the Century

- NGOs bring significant resources (Foreign Currency)
- They provide domestic “green pasture”, thus moderate external brain drain
- NGOs are faster in responding to emergencies
- They are better in taking risk and modelling new ideas

# Ethiopian Civil Society: The Missed Opportunity

## **The Contention:**

During the period of explosion emerging Advocacy/Rights Institutions could have moved with speed and focus more in creating citizen's solidarity forums across interests

# CSOs: Mix of Current Players

- Most are service providers – errand boys of donors, not agenda setters
- A few emerging specialists on rights and issues were nipped in the bud
- Most rebranded fast to fit the mould and (some moult faster to remain in the good books of the powers that be)
- INGOs, some LNGOs and ‘connected personalities’, not citizens’ movements, prominent on state-CSO interface & it didn’t help

# CSOs: Loose Coalition

- Partnership and CSO leadership tested in trying times
- Some were staunch and stayed the course
- Other 'Veteran and eternal Leaders' opted to go quiet – Wisdom? Survival?
- Quiet a few pointed accusing fingers at vocal rights NGOs, not the state
- Absence of organized citizens and communities in the movement acutely exposed
- Donors opted to take the back bench and became mediators, not influencers

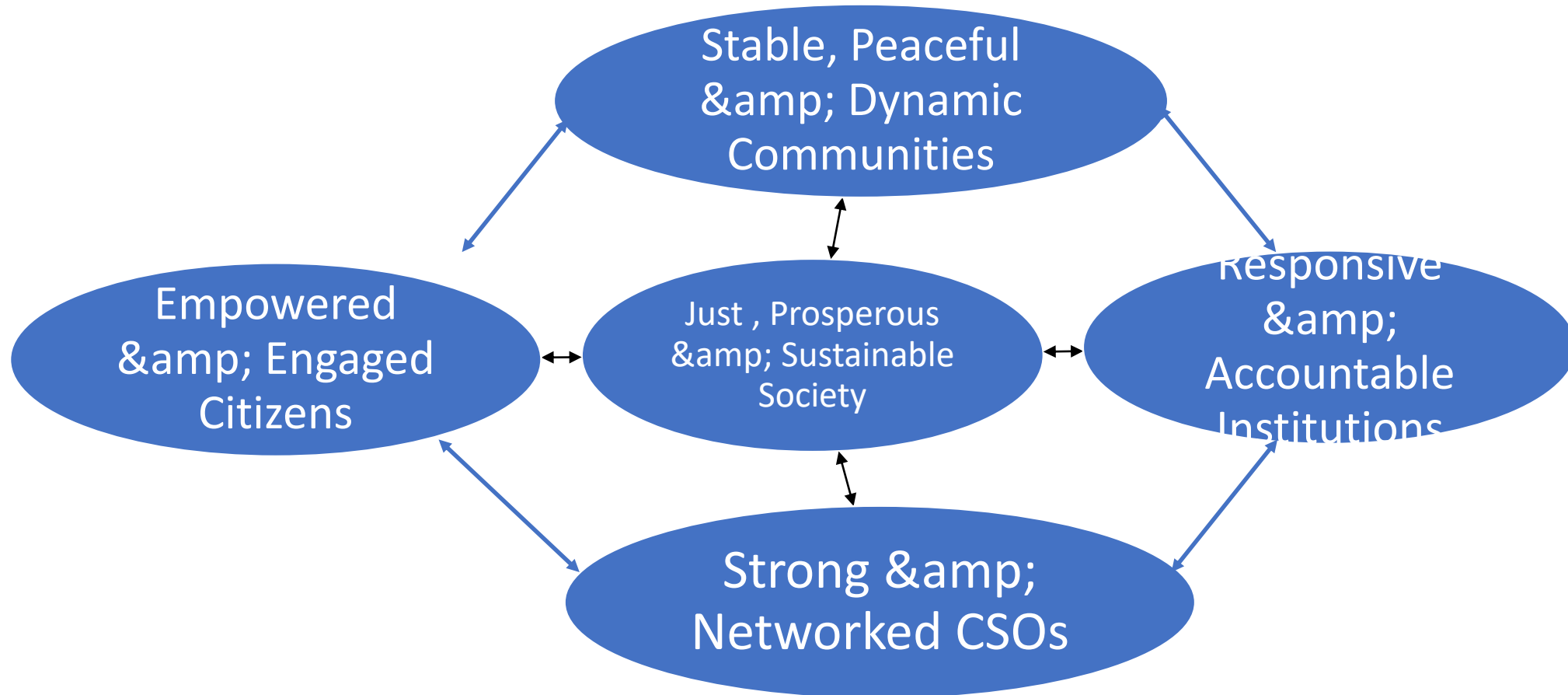
# Opportunities and Challenges Now

- The opening up in the background of:
  - Lost or weak institutional memory of the few rights CSOs
  - Dwindled skills and expertise on rights advocacy and campaigns
  - Acute need for conflict resolution, peace-building and national dialogue
  - Mistrust of existing NGOs by emerging informal formations (especially disenfranchised youth)
- Deficit in institutions and people with value synergy
- Some appreciation from development partners on HRBA - funding

# Going Forward

- Transition reconfirmed organized people's voices, however diverse, matter & vacuum costs!
- The focus should be on empowering genuine people's rights movements to populate the space fast- don't occupy it as NGOs!
- Existing stakeholders may form a consortium of INGOs, LNGOs and Donors working to support organizations based on values and rights
- 'RIGHTS' groups may mushroom but identifying and nurturing value-driven partnerships is a challenge (LNGOs does not mean People's Organization)

# The New Role – Generic ToC for CSOs



# Transition Scenarios & Program

- Rapid review of context, VMV, strategy, programs (in-house then with partners)
- Identify key scenarios, emerging challenges, risks & opportunities
- Adjustments or Transformation?
- Fingers-on-pulse, communication and agility to adapt