



African Commitments to Civil Society Engagement: A review of eight NEPAD countries

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Introduction

This report is a summary of findings of a shadow review of the performance of eight African governments against commitments made at the level of the Organisation of African Unity/African Union (OAU/AU) to strengthen and co-operate with civil society groups and organisations for the promotion of human security. This paper, and the longer monograph upon which it is based, can be found at www.africanreview.org. The countries were selected from the 19 countries that to date have signed up to the African Peer Review Mechanism² (APRM). They are Algeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda. The challenge of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) for African political leaders is to improve governance on the African continent in order to create the conditions for growth and development, both through the continent's own efforts and by attracting greater investment and development assistance from international partners. The APRM is meant to monitor and encourage adherence to the NEPAD standards of good governance.

Critics of NEPAD have argued that it is a state-centric initiative, whose conceptualisation did not involve the people for whom it was designed. While there may be an element of truth to this argument, the African Human Security Initiative (AHSI) does not entirely agree with this criticism. AHSI maintains that while NEPAD is a blueprint provided by Africa's leaders, it is the people who must respond urgently to the opportunity to participate in the implementation of the NEPAD programmes. Khabele Matlosa, Senior Advisor to the Electoral Institute of South Africa alluded to this role when he called on civil society organisations (CSOs) to organise "shadow processes" to interrogate peer review, conduct research and share information with each other so that governments become aware that their people are watching their performance.³ It is within this spirit that seven

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1 Both are with the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP).

2 The 19 countries are: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda.

3 K Matlosa, How should civil society respond to peer review? in *eAfrica: The Electronic Journal of Governance and Innovation*, SAIIA, vol 1, October 2003, Johannesburg, p 13.

THE AFRICAN HUMAN SECURITY INITIATIVE (AHSI)

AHSI is a network of seven African Non-Governmental research organisations that have come together to measure the performance of key African governments in promoting human security. The project is inspired by a wish to contribute to the ambitions of the New Economic Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). Whereas the APRM process has defined a comprehensive set of objectives, standards, criteria and indicators that cover four broad areas, AHSI only engages with one of the four, namely issues of political governance in so far as these relate to human security. Within this area, each AHSI partner has identified a set of key commitments that African leaders have entered into at the level of OAU/AU heads of states meetings and summits. A "shadow review" of how these commitments have been implemented in practice has then been conducted. Eight countries have

been chosen for review, namely Algeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa and Uganda. All eight are members of NEPAD and have acceded to the APRM. While not constituting an exhaustive list of human security challenges in Africa, the AHSI Network selected the following seven clusters of commitments: human rights, democracy and governance; civil society engagement; small arms and light weapons; peacekeeping and conflict resolution; anti-corruption; and terrorism and organised crime. The AHSI partners are the South African Institute for International Affairs (SAIIA), the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa (IHRDA), the Southern Africa Human Rights Trust (SAHRIT), the West African Network for Peace (WANEP), the African Security Dialogue and Research (ASDR), the African Peace Forum (APFO) and the Institute for Security Studies (ISS).

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African institutions involved with research and direct intervention on issues of human security decided to undertake this “shadow review”. The eight countries were selected for a variety of reasons including regional representivity, language, availability of information and the capacity of the partnership. The AHSI hopes to continue this process with the other countries that have signed on to the APRM.

Link between civil society engagement and human security

There are multiple understandings for civil society. For the purpose of this study, the definition of Larry Diamond is most insightful:

“[Civil society is] the realm of organised social life that is voluntary, self generating, self supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by the legal order or set of shared rules ... it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable. It is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the state.”⁴

According to this definition, civil society includes a wide array of organisations such as community groups or community-based organisations; non-governmental organisations (NGOs); labour unions; student and youth organisations; social movements; women’s organisations; traditional leadership; charitable organisations; faith-based organisations; professional associations; and the media.

Human security is assured when ordinary people are able to pursue a safe livelihood on equal terms with others. It focuses on protecting people from dangers, and empowering them to develop their full potential and to participate in decision-making.⁵ The AHSI conceptual framework for review is reflected in a separate publication and points to five levels of security: personal/individual, community, national, regional and international.⁶ Rather than viewing the various levels of security as separate, the AHSI considers them as complementary and interactive. For example, without the provision of effective national security, citizens

cannot be personally secure. And without secure and stable countries and practice of a body of law whereby countries regulate their interaction, regional and international security would remain elusive.⁷

Drawing from these definitions, the AHSI review understands civil society engagement by government first within the context of political pluralism, which implies tolerance and accommodation of diverse views, passions, interests and demands in the public sphere. The absence of political tolerance breeds repression, popular discontent, social and political exclusion, etc. Second, the review understands civil society engagement within the context of popular participation. This allows for the opening of the social and political spaces for ordinary people to participate in decision-making processes and in their own development. Matthew Hassan Kukah highlights a poignant description of the human security consequences for the lack of popular participation:

“The relationship between civil society and states in Africa seems to have some of the basic characteristics of a fortified city. In the fortified city, communication between those inside and those outside is severely restricted by the nature of the fort itself. So there are naturally outsiders and insiders. The thickness of the wall, its height, its impenetrability, are what make it a respectable fort ... These characteristics are supposed to inspire awe and intimidation in the minds of observers ... The result, of course, is that the fortified city is a barricade, a siege: those inside cannot come out and those outside cannot go in ... When civil society feels completely locked out it begins to seek relevance by resorting to such alternatives as migration (exile), informal economic activities, sorcery, witchcraft, cults, genocide, forced relocations, intra- and inter-ethnic, communal or religious violence, ethnic cleansing, etc.”⁸

African heads of state and government have only recently begun to talk of “civil society engagement” within the African Union, after a series of OAU/AU-Civil Society Conferences since 2001, and the drafting of the Statutes for the Economic Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) of the African Union.⁹ However, more long-standing commitments to the related concepts of “popular participation” and “political pluralism” are contained in numerous OAU/

4 L Diamond, Rethinking civil society, quoted in *Crossroads*, USIS Newsletter, Lagos, February 1995, pp 9–10.

5 Final report of the Commission on Human Security, www.humansecurity-chs.org/finalreport/outline.html (accessed on 12 January 2004).

6 J Cilliers, Human security in Africa: A conceptual framework for review, AHSI monograph, Pretoria, 2004, p 8.

7 *Ibid.*, p 9.

8 M H Kukah, *Democracy and civil society in Nigeria*, Spectrum Books, 2003, pp 49.

9 K Sturman & J Cilliers, ECOSOCC: Bringing people’s power to the African Union, in *African Security Review*, ISS, Pretoria, 2003, 12(1), p 73.

AU documents and therefore form the basis for this review. These documents include:

- The African (Banjul) Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981;
- The Treaty Establishing the Africa Economic Community of 1991;
- Relaunching Africa's Economic and Social Development: the Cairo Agenda for Action, 1995;
- The Solemn Declaration on the Conference for Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation in Africa (CSSDCA), 2000;
- The Constitutive Act of the African Union, 2000; and
- The Protocol to the Treaty Establishing the African Economic Community Relating to the Pan-African Parliament, 2001.

In the CSSDCA Solemn Declaration, African heads of state affirm that in order to assure the stability of Africa "all states [must] be guided by strict adherence to the rule of law, good governance, people's participation in public affairs, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, the establishment of political organisations devoid of sectarian, religious, ethnic, regional and racial extremism."¹⁰ They emphatically resolved that "[t]here shall be no hindrance to the promotion of political pluralism" which they defined as "alternative ideas, institutions and leaders."¹¹ The heads of states promised to "protect and promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as the freedom of expression and association, political and trade union, pluralism and other forms of participatory democracy."¹²

For the purpose of this review, the AHSI selected the presence and extent of civil society as well as the presence of and level of freedom enjoyed by both public and private media as indicators of political pluralism. For popular participation the AHSI selected the existence and application of policies for decentralisation, empowerment and support for the participation of especially women in both political processes and development programmes.

Historical development of civil society

For our purposes the political development of civil society in Africa can be divided into four broad phases. In the pre-independence phase civil society groups began

by advancing the economic well-being of their members. Many of them were tribal associations. The social and economic safety nets provided by the early civil associations contributed to the development of Africa's first middle class in the colonies. Drawing on the popular discontent of their people, the middle class exerted pressure on the colonial administrators.

This was the case in most African countries during the struggle for independence.

The period immediately after independence was one in which the distinction between civil society and the state was blurred, and relations generally good. But the marriage between CSOs – especially trade and student unions, bar associations, and religious leaders, on the one hand, and African governments, on the other – did not last. The new élites soon fortified themselves with the same powers and privileges accorded the former colonialists, excluding the citizens that gave their sweat and blood in the freedom struggle.

Within the eight countries under review in this study, the situation in Ethiopia and Algeria is the worst. In the past 25 years, Ethiopia has seen the end of centuries old monarchy followed by civil war, a Marxist-Leninist regime and the establishment, in 1991, of the present government. Consequently, civil society as defined by this review is a recent development in Ethiopia. It remains weak and with little cohesion and occupies little space within the national discourse on policy matters.

In the case of Algeria, civil society experienced intermittent periods of repression and freedom. The 1980s radically altered the dynamic in which the people of Algeria accepted central control in return for economic security by shifting some of the initiatives away from the state toward civil society. Subsequently, "associations of a political character" were legalised and allowed to organise, recruit and demonstrate. Recent years have seen the steady, if slow, expansion of room for civil society engagement in Algeria.

Ghana has a rich civil history, one that played a key role in the struggle for independence amongst others as part of Kwame Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party for "self-government now". Civil associations

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¹⁰ Solemn Declaration on the Conference for Security, Stability, Development and Co-operation in Africa (CSSDCA Solemn Declaration), adopted by the 34th Summit of Heads of State of the OAU, Lomé, Togo, 10–12 July 2000, para. 11.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, para. 14.

continue to play a critical role in Ghana's political, social and economic development, and Ghanaians' thirst for free association and participation in public affairs has not been quenched by nine successful coups, culminating in the restoration of democracy in recent years.

Trained in the French administrative tradition, Senegal's functionaries and political élites have shown a strong preference for a unitary state and distrust of power sharing. Yet, associational life is a natural phenomenon and despite successive attempts after independence to suppress civil society, the authorities had to concede to the pressure, especially during the economic crisis of the 1970s, allowing the beginning of greater leniency in their accommodation of free expression of association.

In Kenya and Nigeria, CSOs played critical roles in the demise of their respective repressive regimes. Although President Jomo Kenyatta established the harambee self-help movement that supported community development through government support, and provided the impetus for subsequent growth, it is his successor in 1978, Daniel Arap Moi, who is credited for the proliferation of civil society groups in Kenya. He was also, however, responsible for fiercely undermining and violently suppressing CSOs during the latter years of his presidency.

CSOs such as the trade unions, the Federation of Nigerian Women's Societies and Zikist movement were at the forefront of the independence struggle in Nigeria. The subsequent marriage between the nationalist parties and civil society groups did not last after independence and civil groups soon turned into forces of opposition. Following the 1966 *coup d'état*, the years that followed saw fierce confrontation between civil society and the successive military regimes (such as that of Babangida) that governed the country as well as manipulation of the former by the latter.

At the end of the Abacha military dictatorship, Nigeria's was a civil society that was activated and mobilised – vibrant and confident, and tested in the most trying periods of Nigeria's recent political experience. It was also a civil society that was bruised by the arrest and detention of its leaders, by the banning and repression of some of its organisations, by scant resources and low capacity, and by the creeping division in vision and strategy. This is a legacy that continues to hamper the inherent dynamism of Nigerian civil society under civilian rule.

During apartheid, the South African state used all means, including violence, to repress civil society, but it was the massive mobilisation of civil society across all sectors of its population, started in the early 1970s, that forced negotiations and eventually the emergence of an ANC government in South Africa some two decades later. For the first decade since negotiations started in 1990, South African civil society enjoyed excellent state-society relations – something that has, however, started to tarnish in recent time. Time will tell whether the cordial relations between CSOs and the ANC government will be sustained.

Finally, despite its vibrancy in pre-independence Uganda, civil society was severely weakened by the subsequent years of the Obote and Amin dictatorships – a period from which it has made some recovery under the much more benign leadership of President Yoweri Museveni. Consequently, in the post-1986 period, the country has witnessed a rapid proliferation of CSOs, particularly in the form of NGOs.

While civil society groups in Ghana, Senegal, Uganda, Nigeria, Kenya and Algeria have passed through various phases of political development, the situation in Ethiopia appears the least vibrant and civil society there remains young and fragile. CSOs in especially Nigeria and Kenya withstood the trials of violent regimes and with fortitude transformed such autocratic regimes into democratic ones.

In all of these countries, civil society groups have become more politically aware and willing to engage the state.

State support to CSOs and press freedom

Since some of the aspects of political pluralism – namely, democracy, elections and political parties – are dealt with by another review in this series¹³, our work focused on the role of the state in promoting, on the one hand, the organisation and functioning of multiple and diverse bodies of CSOs, and on the other, the room for free expression of diverse views, passions, ideas and interests in the various countries under review made possible through commitments to press freedom.

Indicators of the presence and recognition of CSOs in each country include the following:

- What does the constitution say about the association of people – are there policies or constitutional provisions for the free

13 A Hammerstad, *African commitments to democracy in theory and practice: A review of eight NEPAD countries*, AHSI Monograph, Pretoria 2004.

organisation of associations, such as the student or trade unions? If yes, what are they and how have they been upheld in the country?

- Are trade unions allowed to organise themselves freely and independently? How strong are they?
- Is there a diverse, wide range of CSOs within the country?
- What kind of relationships do they have with their government?

Indicators of whether the various governments in question encourage press freedom include:

- Is there a constitutional or legislative provision for the protection of press freedom?
- How many radio and television stations are there in the country?
- How many of these are controlled by the government?
- Do the media address issues that do not conform to government policies and agendas? Can the media be critical of government without repercussions?
- Are there cases of media repression?
- Does the government subsidise the media?
- How would you judge the process of registering a media institution – easy or difficult?

Presence of civil society organisations

Much has improved in civil society and state relations in all eight countries. Trade and student unions as well as bar associations are present and active in

all the countries under review. These have been joined by various NGOs in recent years – although the governments of the countries under review tend to give more freedom to community-based development CSOs than to NGOs.

There are, in particular,

varying degrees of hostility meted out against pro-democracy and human rights groups in all the countries reviewed.

South Africa and Ghana have more favourable conditions for the presence and free operation of all civil CSOs when compared to the other countries in the study. Senegal and Uganda encourage the presence of CSOs but place restrictions on trade unions activities

(in Senegal) and pro-democracy groups (in Uganda). Both Kenya and Nigeria have a vibrant and large civil society sector but government policies do not enable or encourage their operation. Recently the government of Nigeria appointed an Advisor on Civil Society Relations and efforts are being made to cultivate relations with civil society groups. Kenya is reviewing a new constitution which, when passed, could guarantee the free expression of civil associations. Independent civil associations are also emerging in Algeria. Civil society groups in Ethiopia are young and fragile, and trade and students unions suffer occasional repression from state security.

At least on paper no government in the review appears openly opposed to the development and presence of civil associations and, through policy statements, encourages the development of all categories of CSOs. However, concrete frameworks for engagement are yet to be fully established in all except South Africa.

Pundits draw a correlation between co-operation with civil society and the level of international support and presence in the countries under review. These observers argue that the growth of CSOs in Africa, particularly in countries such as South Africa, Ghana and Uganda, is a direct consequence of the democratisation and globalisation project of Western governments. While the link to donor support, and the growth and tolerance of particularly pro-democracy civil society groups may be established, it cannot be the only factor behind this significant progress in Africa's democracy and governance. Most African leaders have seen the devastating effects of bad governance and barricaded regimes on the security of ordinary people and the development of Africa. They are determined to break from the past and chart a new and more promising future.

The integral link between the presence of civil society, democratic development and human security is well established. Countries like South Africa, Ghana and Senegal, where CSOs operate freely with limited or no government interference, experience stability, democratic development and improved standards of governance. In Uganda and Algeria, where civil society enjoys only a degree of free expression, there is limited stability and democracy is fragile. Nigeria and Kenya have robust CSOs but these have operated under repression for much of their post-independence history. The resolute nature of civil society groups in these countries played a key role in the replacement of repressive regimes by democratically elected governments. Even in Algeria which was, for many years, under effective military control, there is clear

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evidence that democratic space is steadily expanding and tolerance of CSOs, especially pro-democracy and human rights organisations, is cautiously improving. Ethiopia is the only country in the review in which the concept of civil society is relatively new. Relationships between the government of Ethiopia, especially the regional administrations, and its CSOs remain characterised by mutual suspicion.

Press freedom

A major vehicle for the expression of diverse views, passions and ideas in a given society is the media. As Michael Bratton¹⁴ indicates: in order to be politically active, citizens require means to communicate with one

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another and to debate the type of government they desire for themselves. He makes the point that the most important forum where civic discourse can take place is the media,

both print and electronic. Bratton argues that there is a correlation between a vibrant and strong civil society and a thriving media. Most governments in Africa have systematically engaged in media gagging. Some use the media as a vehicle for state propaganda. In an effort to protect and promote the media, African heads of state have committed themselves to promote freedom of expression and to encourage the establishment of independent media outlets in their respective countries through various texts like the Solemn Declaration on the CSSDCA, associated Memorandum of Understanding and the Constitutive Act of the African Union.

All governments in the review have made efforts to guarantee freedom of the press. However, the extent of press freedom differs between the countries reviewed. There are constitutional provisions for the freedom of expression in all the countries reviewed. Legislations, independent institutions and capacity building efforts for the press have been attempted in all the countries. However, more is expected from the governments of Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal, Algeria, Ethiopia and Uganda to guarantee press freedom to a level deemed acceptable by comparative international standards.

According to a report from Freedom House and the Committee for the Protection of Journalists, South

Africa and Ghana allow for press freedom. In Senegal, Nigeria and Uganda the press is partly free. Kenya has a long history of press repression but that did not stop the media from thriving. Amidst all odds the Kenya press is strong. The media is constrained in Algeria and Ethiopia. The Algerian media has undergone high and low periods. Under the National Liberation Front (FLN) the press was used as a state propaganda machine; however, this changed in the early 1990s, paving the way for a short-lived blossoming of the media until the coup in January 1992. Currently, a semblance of media freedom has returned to Algeria but independent media institutions are punished in subtle ways for not toeing the government line. Ethiopia has the worst record of media repression, although the central government is gradually improving press freedom.

The link between press freedom and human security was well articulated by James D Wolfensohn, president of the World Bank. He declared that a free press is essential to the economic and political development of poor nations. "Free press is not a luxury," he said, "it is at the core of equitable development." The World Bank boss indicated that the media can expose corruption and keep a check on public policy. The press can also enable people to voice diverse opinions on governance and reform and help build public consensus for change.¹⁵ In a study conducted by the Bank, an integral link was established between a lack of free press, fewer political rights for citizens, inferior governance, less developed markets and strikingly inferior outcomes in the areas of education and health.¹⁶

In this AHSI study we have observed that South Africa and Ghana have relative press freedom, with robust CSOs in all spheres (pro-democracy, human rights, conflict resolution, community development, etc.). The two countries are also relatively stable with thriving democracies and an increase in their levels of foreign direct investments. Uganda and Senegal are next on the scale in terms of press freedom and they appear also to have improved in the areas of development and stability (although both countries are fighting insurgent groups in their northern regions). From the findings of this review, the AHSI agrees with Wolfensohn's argument. Free press is both an indicator for stability and democratisation as well as a catalyst for economic development.

14 M Bratton, Civil society and political transitions in Africa, in J W Harbeson, D Rothchild and N Chazan (eds.), *Civil society and the state in Africa*, Colorado, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994, p 417.

15 K D Karlekar, Freedom of the press 2003, *A global survey of media independence*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003, p 27.

16 *Ibid.*

Commitments to popular participation

In 1990, the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation was adopted at a landmark conference in Arusha, Tanzania. The Charter asserts that: “African countries must realise that more than ever before, their greatest resource is their people and that it is through their active and full participation that Africa can surmount the difficulties that lie ahead.”¹⁷ The Charter concludes: “[t]he principles of popular participation, equal opportunity and equitable access to resources for all people must underlie all development objectives and strategies.”¹⁸

Given the central role of women in development, the Arusha Conference called for the elimination of biases, particularly with respect to reducing the burden on women and taking positive actions to ensure their full equality and effective participation. The Conference recommended that national policies be established to enable honest and open dialogue between African governments, grass-roots organisations and NGOs in order to incorporate grass-roots participatory development in national policy-making.

These commitments echo those made in various OAU and AU declarations and decisions, as well as legal treaties and protocols entered into by African heads of state over the years, some of which are listed earlier in this paper. For example, the CSSDCA Solemn Declaration affirms that the “active and genuine participation of citizens of every country in the decision-making processes and in the conduct of public affairs must be fostered and facilitated.”¹⁹ It also notes that “popular participation, equal opportunity, transparency in public policy-making and partnership between government and peoples are necessary for the achievement of development.”²⁰ The heads of state agreed to “encourage the participation and contribution of civil society in our states in the efforts to bring about further democratisation on our continent.”²¹ They also agreed to “give special emphasis to the empowerment of women to enable them to actively and independently participate in activities aimed at promoting economic development.”²²

The following indicators were identified as necessary in reviewing the above-mentioned commitments to encourage popular participation in governance:

- Are there mechanisms to facilitate popular participation in the formulation of public policy?
- Are there policies for the full participation of civil society in development programmes?
- Does the government have an institution that addresses the participation of CSOs in development initiatives? If yes, what are its mandates and programmes?

The following questions were identified as indicators of whether women’s empowerment and participation is encouraged in each country:

- Are there special funds to support women’s organisations?
- Are there women’s associations for development? How many and what role does the government play to capacitate them?
- Do women play a role in conflict prevention and mediation?
- What does the constitution say about women’s empowerment in the public sphere?
- Are there laws enacted to protect women and their political development?
- Is there a gender ministry? What are its major programmes?
- How many women are in parliament, in the cabinet, or in major decision-making positions in the country?
- What particular policy changes have taken place to accommodate the unique concerns of women?

Programmes and institutions to promote popular participation

Participatory society, according to the United Nations Development Programme, is a precondition for development in today’s world. Participation enables a society to make use of the energies and capacities of its individual members and organised groups.²³ The UNDP further notes that participation “calls for a greater role by civil society; necessitates

17 African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation, Arusha, 1990.

18 *Ibid.*

19 CSSDCA Solemn Declaration, *op cit*, para. 11.

20 *Ibid*, para. 12.

21 *Ibid*, para. 14.

22 *Ibid.*

23 www.pogar.org/countries/decentralization.asp?cid=1. Accessed 21 June 2004.

decentralisation of the public administration; enables citizens to share in the power structure and to influence social policies.”²⁴

Actual participation of citizens depends on a number of factors which includes the bringing of government closer to the people through decentralisation; the ability and willingness of local officials to organise consultations and share in the decision-making processes; the development of citizens through education and economic empowerment to participate; and the deliberate effort to involve marginalised groups like women, the disabled and the illiterate in decision-making processes.

Much progress has been made towards the enactment of laws for the promotion of popular participation in all of the countries reviewed. Policies for popular participation and decentralisation of governance are active or in discussion in all the countries reviewed. South Africa has well established legislation and mechanisms for popular participation and for bringing government closer to the people. Ghana and Senegal are next in terms of progress toward popular participation. Kenya is currently debating a new constitution which, when completed, could enhance popular participation. More is required in Nigeria to assure the participation of its people in public processes and development. Ethiopia is undertaking an ambitious federal system and the decentralisation of administrative units. With an extremely high level of illiteracy and poverty, this effort has not yet translated into popular participation. Algeria is also operating a decentralised structure but culture and long years of government control is slowing the pace at which ordinary people can respond to these change. Presently, the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) has developed special funds that will facilitate the participation of the Kenyan people especially in development programmes.

None of the countries reviewed have all the prerequisites needed to promote popular participation. Illiteracy, high levels of unemployment, the cultural, religious, economic and political exclusion of marginalised groups and the continuing fortification of some or all aspects of the state from its citizens persist in all the countries, albeit at variant degrees.

The AHSI is, however, pleased that all the countries that are part of this review have made some effort to engage its people to public decision-making processes.

Popular participation is likely to be sustained in South Africa, Ghana, Uganda and Senegal as the concept is supported by constitutional provisions, domestic laws, and concrete programs. Popular participation as a political culture is fragile in Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia and Algeria. These countries will need more political will and commitment to break the mutual suspicion between them and their people.

Women’s empowerment and participation in public affairs

African women have made little progress in accessing the decision-making hierarchy in Africa since the fourth world conference on women in Beijing in 1995. According to the Inter-parliamentary Union, women comprise only 9 per cent of parliamentarians in Africa compared to the global average of 13,6 per cent.²⁵ Women bear the brunt of the increasing poverty on the continent. Culture, religion, politics, economic structures, etc. have all been designed to favour men over women. As if to add insult to injury, about 70 per cent of the poor in Africa are women. Key indicators of the feminine face of poverty include: high infant and maternal mortality rates; increased gender-based violence; limited access and control of productive resources such as land; inaccessibility to social services and justice; and women’s denial of opportunities to improve. These are critical to the human security challenges that Africa faces.

African leaders have made several commitments to improve the lot of women and to make them central to Africa’s development. This section reviews the extent to which African leaders have kept their promises to women.

Women have greater political voice and access to development programmes in South Africa and Uganda than in the other six countries, and there are also more active female politicians in South Africa and Uganda than the rest of the countries under review. Both South Africa and Uganda operate affirmative action to increase women’s participation in political affairs. Entrenched in its constitution, South Africa also has an independent commission on gender that addresses all human rights issues affecting women. Senegal is next in terms of public support for women’s participation in development and public affairs. The current government specifically supports women’s efforts, and appointed a woman as its first female prime minister.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ R Okello and J Omale (eds) *A journey of courage: Kenyan women’s experiences of the 2002 general elections, AWC Features*, 2004, p 9.

The government of Ethiopia has made significant effort to address women's issues and it is currently in the process of accelerating the implementation of a national policy. The determination of the federal government is, however, tempered by tradition, illiteracy and poverty. Ghana, Senegal and Nigeria operate ministries on women's affairs but there are laws (customary and statutory) still active in these countries that undermine women's development.

All attempts made to include a specific clause in the Ghanaian 1992 constitution to address the concerns of women were unsuccessful. Women's issues were dropped from the 1999 constitution of Nigeria. Algeria is beginning to be more responsive to women's issues although the government made it clear that women's freedom and participation will not supersede Islamic laws. Where these freedoms violate the Islamic code, the latter will prevail. Political violence against women occasionally occurs in Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya.

In a study conducted by the Austrian Development Corporation in Ethiopia, it was observed that gender inequalities impose large costs on the health and well-being of men, women and children, and affect their ability to improve their lives.²⁶ In addition to the personal costs, the study reveals that gender inequalities reduce productivity and thus lower prospects for reducing poverty and ensuring economic progress. Gender inequalities, according to the study, also weaken a country's governance and thus the effectiveness of its development policies. A wealth of evidence from countries around the world demonstrates that societies with large, persistent gender inequalities pay the price of more poverty, malnutrition, illness and other deprivations. Poverty affects women more, and to fight poverty, women must be considered more.²⁷

While these findings of the Austrian Development Corporation may not be new to African heads of state, investments made to improve women's well-being, thereby improving the well-being of society in general, is still minimal. The AHSI observes the urgency at which a more targeted response – addressing illiteracy, long-held cultural attitudes and practices, affirmative action and other focus programmes, more openness to women's participation in politics – is required.

Conclusion

Throughout the continent's history, ordinary citizens have always been at the forefront of socio-political change. Popular participation and political pluralism are not gifts to civil society. Citizens throughout Africa fought both their governments and international actors to earn them. We contend that co-operation between the state and citizens is central and germane to good governance, democracy and rapid social and economic advancement. The African leaders in numerous documents pledged their commitment to increase co-operation with their people, and to open and diversify the political space. Essentially the AHSI is attempting to remind the leaders of their commitments and to recognise those who have made good their promises to their people and to the entire continent.

From our study it was gratifying to note that dynamic and positive changes are taking place in the countries reviewed. While in some the changes are rapid, in others changes appear to take hold gradually. In all but two countries (South Africa and Ethiopia), civil society engagement has undergone intermittent periods of civil society engagement and alienation and then again a re-engagement. South Africa is still in the golden age of co-operation between state and society. CSOs in South Africa are invited to lend their expertise and support to the ANC government in all spheres of influence. Ethiopia is arguably the oldest state in Africa but it is the youngest of the eight states reviewed in terms of citizens' participation and tolerance of diverse political opinions.

South Africa is rated as the most advanced in delivering on all the benchmarks summarised in this paper, although much remains to be done. Some observers argue that it is too soon to judge developments in South Africa, as most African countries went through the period of intimate co-operation with civil society immediately after independence and later experienced a bitter divorce between the two. It is only 10 years since the end of apartheid and the marriage between civil society and the ANC government still has some life. It is argued that when civil society finally disentangles itself from the state, only then can we have a better appreciation of the government's toleration and co-operation with civil society as an autonomous entity. However, optimists believe that South Africa's democracy is

²⁶ Austrian Development Corporation, Ethiopia Sub-programme Gender and Democracy 2004–2006. www.bmaa.gov.at/view.php3?f_d=1812&LNG=en&version (accessed 8 July 2004).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

here to stay and therefore civil society will remain prominent and engaged.

Ghana and Senegal are progressing with political pluralism and popular participation but poverty and the lack of clear policy frameworks for civil society engagement undermine their attempts at deliberate co-operation with civil society. Uganda seems to be the most decentralised but the government still does not tolerate confrontation, as it insists that civil society groups are to complement government efforts in service delivery. The Movement System has undermined political pluralism. Ethiopia and Algeria are yet to recover from their feudal and socialist pasts.

A common denominator in these countries is the proliferation of NGOs and CSOs. To a large extent the growth of CSOs is facilitated by development partners who argue for the support of this sector in order to impact directly the development of the poor. Only South Africa has a government policy and institutional framework to support CSOs and NGOs. Elsewhere, it depends entirely on donor support from outside the continent. Besides, the sector lacks important skills such as advocacy, policy analysis, coalition-building, etc. Some sceptics argue that governments reluctantly co-operate with whatever is called “civil society” just to remain in the good books with development partners. Once this element is removed, they argue, African governments could easily regress into the years of isolationism and state fortification against their societies.

The media, a critical instrument for development, democratisation, popular participation and the expression of pluralism, operates freely in South Africa and Ghana. The press is partly free in Uganda, Nigeria and Senegal. Media freedom is constrained in Ethiopia, Algeria and Kenya. Human security, which is the interest of the AHSI review, cannot be guaranteed in countries where there is no press freedom.

Commitments to the lot and status of women have been slow to realise. Only South Africa, and to a lesser extent Uganda, have translated their commitments into concrete actions. The government of Ethiopia

appears to have the political will to address the problems of women but it has to overcome resistance from culture, ignorance and poverty. Of all the eight countries, Ethiopia has the worse conditions for women. High rates of infant and maternal mortality, female genital mutilation and illiteracy are only some of the conditions that women suffer in that country.

What is satisfying is the fact that women are not waiting for African leaders to deliver better conditions and access to political power on a platter. Women's groups and organisations are active in all the countries reviewed. They are determined to force their way onto the scene even if they are not invited. The courage and determination of women to surmount culture, religion, “male egoism” and deprivations is bearing fruit in Uganda, Kenya, Senegal and South Africa. Women in Algeria and Ethiopia may need to learn from their counterparts in these countries.

African leaders, in the documents reviewed, have a clear sense of what Africa's problems are and what the solutions should be. Were African leaders to implement half of what they promised in the commitments outlined herein, the continent would be well on its way to prosperity. But as it is often said, Africa has never been short of ideas. Indeed, the OAU/AU has by far the most well-defined sets of rules, norms and values on where the African continent should be in terms of development and integration. Sadly, however, the continent has little to show in terms of delivering on the many lofty commitments. The bold and concrete steps taken by governments to subject themselves to a peer review process provide an opportunity for stock-taking. Whether stock-taking will translate into more positive and productive actions is left for future reviews.

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