**THE STATE AS FIRST AMONG EQUALS**

State-civil society relations in the development context

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**Introduction**

The traditional view of civil society-state relations is that civil society, in its plurality, is a rival to government power. Within the development debate therefore the argument becomes how powerful should civil society be relative to government (or vice versa) for there to be good development. This paper attempts to address this problem from a different perspective. Drawing on work of the East Asian developmentalist and state theorists, I would like to reframe the tension between the two actors in terms of the quality of the relationship between civil society and government. The tension remains, but it is not necessarily seen as a trade-off between the two. This theme underlies this analysis and will recur during the paper.

This paper will start by introducing a few useful concepts brought into development thinking by East Asian developmentalist scholars, and argue the state is integral to the development process. With this foundation in place the paper will then review recent literature on civil society, and attempt to draw out some conclusions for civil society-state relations, for optimal development outcomes.

**Some useful concepts**

Before the paper analyses traditional approaches to civil society-state relations, I would like to mention a few concepts which will inform the perspective presented in this paper.

There is some evidence in the literature on development that a substantial shift in thinking about development is approaching. Charles Gore argues the ‘Washington consensus’ (Stiglitz 1998) approach to development has reached its limits. Latin American neostructuralism and East Asian developmentalism primarily have undermined the Washington Consensus (WC), (which appears to by synonymous with the New Policy Agenda). The successful and extensive interventions of states within those models undermines the liberal, decentralist inclinations of the WC (Gore 2000). Its possible that the late 1990s’ redoubled focus on institutions of government (good governance) signals the beginning of this shift, awaiting the fuller development of a new paradigm.

Alan Fowler in a 2002 paper puts forward the suggestion that a old ‘newtonian’ view of development, views seeing different actors in development (government, civil society, private sector) as discrete groups interacting in a closed system, is moribund and due for replacement. He suggests three varieties of such a model are also all now inadequate and suggests a ‘complex systems’ approach to development should replace this old paradigm. A ‘complex systems’ model views civic organizations in terms of civic energies, interactions between organizations and contextual factors. Krishna and Uphoff (2001) see the state and civil society as existing at different points along the same governance continuum. And as both Gore (2000) and Fowler (2002, p 3) state, historical and cultural context of development efforts are pivotal rather than marginal.

These two streams of thinking overlap with thinking from within the neostatist or developmentalist thinking coming out of East Asian development success, as mentioned by Gore (2000). Writers such as Chalmers Johnson, Robert Wade, Linda Weiss, Alice Amsden were concerned largely with understanding the nature of the success of the East Asian model of development. The nature of government interactions with the private sector was the focus. One notion which underpinned much of work in this field was that of Michael Mann’s ‘infrastructural power’. Infrastructural power, in contrast to despotic power, is power gained
through state interactions with society - power through society, not over society. Whereas despotic power over a people is maintained with a powerful and active military, infrastructural power is maintained through intertwining the state with society, and vice versa. He sees the development of modern liberal democracies as the history of the rise of infrastructural power, at the expense of despotic power (Mann 1984: pp 88-104). The focus is drawn to the quality of interactions between state and other actors rather than viewing the interaction between society and the state in zero-sum terms (Mann 1993, p 45-91).

Terms such as ‘interconnectedness’, ‘embedded autonomy’ and ‘governed interdependence’ pervade the literature of neostatism and developmentalism. Reflecting the success of those countries, writers in the field of civil society and development are perhaps drawing lessons from them in looking at civil society-government relations. They are doing so with a renewed focus on the relationships which work, rather than at the actors in conflict (Fukuyama & Marwah 2000, Uphoff & Krishna 2001, Fowler 2002, Stiglitz 1998).

The overlap between the neostatist thinking and this more recent civil-society government thinking refocuses discussion on the quality of the interactions between the actors in the development equation. The focus is not the relative size of the sectors, not which precedes which and not on which carries more intrinsic value, but on what arrangements and subsequent interactions between different actors provide optimal development outcomes.

Notions of infrastructural power have much in common with the complex systems approach. Infrastructural power, in the developmentalist context, was applied mainly to analysis of state-private sector relations. Fowler is thinking mainly of civil society-state relations. It is likely though, that the notion is applicable to both.

What is civil society?

Larry Diamond attempts to provide a comprehensive definition of civil society in Toward Democratic Consolidation, which I will draw on heavily:

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

Civil society is concerned with public rather than private ends....civil society relates to the state in some way but does not aim to win formal power’ (Diamond 1994)

According to Diamond civil society does not include profit seeking activities (basically the conduct of commerce), private ‘inward looking activities’ (recreation, spiritual and entertainment) but does include activities in-between profit-seeking activities and government, and private activities and government. So for example included in civil society are professional/commercial associations and networks, religious associations. Also included are organizations like civic associations, issue oriented associations, developmental associations, community welfare associations, educational associations etc.

He sees civil society as encompassing pluralism and diversity. Organizations seeking to reduce pluralism and diversity through ‘monopoliz[ing] a functional space in society, claiming that it represents the only legitimate path’ contradict the nature and purpose of civil society and therefore cannot constitute it (Diamond 1994, p 7). Anti-civil society organizations are not part of civil society.

Other writers highlight additional features of civil society. These are worth
mentioning because they highlight some weaknesses of the traditional view of civil society in development. Foley and Edwards (1996) have found two different types of civil society in the literature. ‘Civil Society I’ draws on the work of Tocqueville and leads to Putnam, and describes the ‘dense network of associations’ necessary for an effective democracy. It contrasts with ‘Civil Society II’ which sees civil society as ‘a sphere of action that is independent of the state and that is capable - precisely for this reason - of energizing resistance to tyrannical regime.’. They use this duality to emphasize the contradictions in arguments about civil society. Civil Society I is effective in improving governance when it neuters major, potentially destructive, social cleavages by crossing them with multiple, overlapping associations. Paradoxically this increases civil society’s independence from government, reducing its governability. Civil society is both state-enhancer and bulwark against state power. In this framework civil society can both strengthen and weaken government.

Krishna and Uphoff (2001), and Fowler (2002) highlight different definitions of civil society, suggesting different emphases or underlying assumptions. They do seem to agree that current definitions are inadequate, neglecting the complexity of interactions between different actors. They agree that a new paradigm is required.

As mentioned in the introduction the paradox can be approached by moving the focus from the actors, or sectors in zero-sum conflict, to the quality of the interactions between key sectors.

Before attempting to do this, this paper will look briefly at the traditional view of state-civil society relations.

State-civil society relations

Bearing in mind the conflicting roles of civil society within the literature, as state-enhancer and bulwark against state power, what roles should civil society and government together play to enhance development - or to borrow Amartya Sen’s terms, to increase real human freedoms? (Sen 1999, p 3)

One good place to start is with the traditional relationship between these two sectors, looking at what they provide each other.

Why civil society needs the state

Civil society in the developing context needs several fundamental things from government. Most importantly it needs a certain civic space within which to operate. Hegel said “The state is necessary to guarantee the civility of civil society” (in Wiktorowicz 2001, p 90). Hadenius and Uggla (1996, p 1628) see sympathetic government is pivotal to the existence and effectiveness of civil society. Without such space civil society is unlikely to operate.

If a state has provided the bare bones of a civic space in terms of a legal framework, civil society would tend to need to work with some legitimate entity to achieve its objectives. Civil society needs an ‘touchstone’ or a ‘canvas’ for its activities. More often than not the state provides the means to realizing civil society’s objectives. Civil society is dependent on the state to be effective with (or against) the state (Blair 1997).

The interesting point is that although civil society is viewed as separate from and often in opposition to the state, it relies on the state for its existence and a focus for its activities. It is inexorably linked to the state and dependent on it (Krishna & Uphoff 2001, p 4). This again stresses the weakness of the traditional view of state-civil society relations.

I suggest the state is an important precondition for civil society. In the developed world, which developed over generally longer periods with less ‘catch-up development’, civil society is often viewed as having ‘emerged’ from civil society. This argument is clearly strong for those nations. In the developing world however considering domestic and international contexts, an undeveloped nation faces greater relative powerlessness that did the developed nations at the time of their development. Thus the initial steps towards development are proportionately more difficult. In this situation the state is the actor most likely to be able to facilitate conditions for development. They cannot deliver development alone however.
Why the state needs civil society

In contrast, the state can exist without civil society. It can't be a good state without civil society, but initially at least the state can exist without it.

Civil society provides the state various things which clearly enhance the state. In this context civil society can broadly be characterized as:

- Bridge between the state and citizens
- Instrumental teacher (providing leaders and teaching democratic values)
- Institution builder
- Information and ideas producer (providing a democratic information infrastructure)
- Social capital builder

Civil society is pivotal in providing good government through the roles outlined above. It initially needs the state to provide the civil space which becomes the basis of civil society’s activities. Once established and active it will likely be integral to the functioning of governments, as in the advanced democracies. Civil society provides the civil body, which fills the civil framework provided by the state. They become interdependent and at times almost indistinguishable.

The initial step, however, for the existence of civil society and its interactions with the state must usually come from the state (Clarke 1998, p 51, Hadenius & Uggla 1996, p 1635).

The 'state as precondition' proposition places the state in the centre of any development equation. It is a necessary precondition. The issue of whether or not the state remains at the centre of the development equation as development progresses is another issue. This paper argues that it does (as does Hadenius & Uggla 1996, p 1635) by virtue of the two points discussed above - the 'state as precondition' argument, and by virtue of the necessity of civil society-state interdependence - though its role changes as development progresses.

Ongoing primacy for the state?

If one accepts the weaknesses of the traditional view. And if one accepts this focus on the relationships between various actors in developing nations, and notions of infrastructural power, it is clear the state's role is integral and ongoing. In fact, as a state develops its infrastructural power its role can only be enhanced, while at the same time necessarily losing its arbitrary (or despotic) power.

The state therefore is crucial at the beginning of the process of development, and its involvement is increasingly necessary as development progresses. Implicit also in this perspective is the concurrent rise of civil society. For the state to govern through society, ever greater segments of civil society must be brought into the processes of governance. The interactions between state and civil society must necessarily become more numerous, more dense and more complex.

Perspectives on civil society

Empirical findings

Recent empirical and theoretical work highlights several problems faced by civil society. I will briefly cover the main findings and at the end of this section discuss implications for state-civil society relations in light of the above discussion.

In Clarke’s opinion its is pretty clear the state sets the terms of civil society engagement with the state (Clarke 1998, p 51), not the reverse. 'The role of the state is crucial' in providing the necessary framework for civil society's activities (Hadenius & Uggla 1996, p 1635). The state can and often does provide resources to civil society (Ashman, Brown & Zwick 1998, p 14). Hadenius & Uggla (1996) and Ashman (2001) both stress the pivotal role of the state.

- Civil society is dependent on the state because it provides a framework in which to operate.

The work covered for this section suggests civil society does not create development. It appears to be a constituent part and contributes to development but can also undermine it (Clarke 1998, p 48). Similarly civil society doesn't create democracy (Clarke 1998, p 50), though it plays a big role in building or consolidating it (in Clarke 1998, p 48-51). Civil society strengthens the state (Clarke 1998, p51).
Civil society is integral to development but does not create it.

The literature also suggests the nature and quantity of grassroots financial support is crucial to the quality and success of CSOs (Ashman, Brown & Zwick 1998, pp 13-14). Donors inevitably pursue their interests, which don't necessarily coincide with civil society's, and strong domestic support strengthen civil society's position (Ashman, Brown & Zwick 1998). Other writers in the field stress the importance of active domestic involvement in civil society to protect its integrity (Hadenius & Uggla 1996, p 1636), and more generally they stress the importance of local ownership of civil society development activities (Rich 2002).

To be effective, civil society organizations need a reasonable degree of local ownership and a local grassroots base.

Another important theme is to do with the effect high levels of donor funding have on the operation of civil society in developing countries. Edwards (1999) finds that civil society organizations need a strong grassroots base to succeed. CSOs largely funded by international donors diminish the effectiveness of CSOs (Townsend, Porter & Mawdsley 2002) - he who pays the piper calls the tune (Hulme and Edwards 1997, p 8). A 'intermediate' amount of state funding or donor funding is useful, but the danger of dependency are ominous (Edwards and Hulme 1996), but can be avoided by requiring local beneficiaries' ongoing contribution (Hadenius & Uggla 1996, p 1635).

Large scale foreign donor funding diminishes civil society effectiveness if not complemented by a strong local resource and membership base.

There is also evidence of the key role markets and the private sector play in development, vis a vis civil society. Several writers stress the importance of linking the core work of CSOs with the local economies and government structures. Edwards & Hulme (2001) stress the importance of markets (p 961) and Ashman (2001, p 1110), in discussing civil society collaboration with the private sector, finds that an empowered civil society (one having a domestic and reliable resource base) is more likely to succeed in promoting development. And success in civil society-private sector collaboration is more likely in sectors linked to business interests like education and employment creation (Ashman, 2001, p 1111). Waddell (1997, p i) finds that linking civil society and the private sector to complement each others' strengths and ameliorate each others' weaknesses is important for development, although he stresses maintaining a distinction between the two is important.

Collaboration with the private sector can strengthen civil society (especially in areas which produce economic spillover benefits) if balanced by a grassroots resource base.

Hadenius and Uggla (1996, p 1636) suggest that civil society should dedicate considerable efforts towards coordination to 'overcome fragmentation within civil society', as does Ashman (2001, p 1111). This point is made because civil society can be very uncivil, and fledgling democracies, who usually develop active civil societies very quickly, are generally relatively unstable. A degree of coordination and common purpose within civil society can contribute to the mitigation of this instability.

Coordination and cooperation within civil society assists development through building stability.

These conclusions broadly support or complement conclusions reached in the earlier sections of the paper.

What role for civil society?

From the conclusions in the empirical literature review and the theoretical considerations earlier in the paper, I would like to suggest three themes which may provide a useful foundation for state-civil society relations: an autonomous civil society, an enmeshed civil society, and a civil society focused on quality of interactions between itself and other actors.

An autonomous civil society

A key challenge for civil society is therefore finding the right balance of
funding from different sources, while maintaining its grassroots links. A solid and reliable grassroots support base constrains civil society, but also ensures it fulfills its civil functions while engaging with diverse institutions, such as foreign and domestic governments, other local and international CSOs. The question of how and when autonomy fades and dependency starts is a complex issue. To avoid that danger, civil society should seek to maintain a ‘reasonable degree’ of autonomy.

An enmeshed civil society
While protecting its autonomy, civil society should engage heavily with government, the private sector and other members of civil society. Development occurs when the relationships between sectors proliferate, moderating and mainstreaming the actions of the others. For every gain the state makes in its reach there is an equivalent concession to civil society. This trade-off is the relationship which builds civil society and a modern, effective state. Further, in maintaining a core constituency and enmeshing heavily, civil society brings more groups and individuals into the ‘empowered fold’. And the more citizens involved, directly or indirectly, in decision making structures, the better.

A focus on the quality of interactions
Avoiding perspectives seeing different sectors as inclined to good or bad, I suggest civil society embrace actors in all sectors maintaining a focus on the quality of the interaction - while maintaining a reasonable degree of autonomy. Civil society has much to give the state and the private sector, and much to gain from them. They are constituent parts of a complex whole. Building mutually beneficial relationships - while always maintaining autonomy - will implicitly deliver good development outcomes.

These themes are very broad and simple. They place the emphasis of state-civil society relations on quality relationships. Building quality relationships within these already intertwined and interdependent sectors is crucial and instrumental in achieving development.

References
Gerard Clarke, Non-governmental organizations and politics in the developing world, Political Studies, XLVI; 1998.
Axel Hadenius and Fredrik Uggla, ‘Making civil society work, promoting
Notes
1 Joseph Stiglitz (1998, part 4) touches on these issues indirectly with his emphasis on institution and social capital building.
2 The first four points are taken primarily from Diamond (1994).
3 Civil society can form a bridge between the monolithic state and communities through civil society. Civil society can bring groups of people closer to government or into government through the institutions of civil society. This has the additional advantage of potentially improving government decision making by bringing more people into decision making processes. They stimulate political participation.
4 Civil society can provide a source of future leaders for government, one of its instrumental values. An associated instrumental role of civil society is its educative role. The very act of organizing institutionally to peacefully influence state decision making through negotiation provides instrumentally valuable learning about the conduct of democracy. Civil society can be the ‘school of compromise’.
5 Civil society facilitates the creation of formalized institutions of representation of interests. These institutions allow for a plurality of views to be represented to government and vice versa.
6 Civil society often takes a lead role in disseminating information and fomenting ideas within society. This complements its other roles by facilitating organized and informed debate with government on relevant issues.
7 An effective civil society also provides what Foley and Edwards call ‘Civil Society I’ benefits. The dense associational linkages facilitate governability through cohesion. Such benefits serve to decrease social cleavages and enhance social capital (Foley & Edwards 1996).
8 There are an array of intertwined state and civil society organizations. Australian examples include; the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (and SBS), trade unions (tax relief, fund political party), universities.
9 1965 Indonesia and early 1990s Somalia are good examples. Once government starts to break down to the point of not being able to maintain order, civil society will not be able to operate.
10 Civil society organizations (CSOs)
11 ‘Although it may not be easy to mobilize new funds when already well-funded by international sources, connection to domestic sources of fund can serve as insurance against changing condition which may bring severe challenges to organization identity and relevance’, p 14
12 Determining a ‘reasonable degree’ of autonomy is difficult and dependent on many contextual and other factors. This paper will not attempt to address this major challenge. Several of the referenced articles touch on this issue.