

THE ROLE OF CIVIL  
SOCIETY IN  
MANAGING  
CORRUPTION

THE WATCHMEN OF THE NATION

BOTSWANA CENTRE FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY

## 1. Introduction

To reach the answer of what the role of Civil Society is in managing Corruption, there lies the inherent need to self reflect and understand what our understanding of Corruption is, and what our definition of Civil Society is.

Answering these two questions will

- A. Give us a clearer picture of WHAT we are combating. Are our efforts against corruption challenged because we are not adequately grasping what corruption IS? Are our definitions clashing with those of the people around us? Do we count all “unethical” behaviour as corrupt behaviour? Is our definition of corruption based on a legal, political, academic, social, religious, individual or mixed understanding? How will each of these perspectives change the way we tackle corruption and the results we can expect?
- B. Explain why we place ANY expectation at all on the shoulders of CSO. Are those expectations reasonable and or achievable considering what we define Civil Society to be?

There are several definitions or attempts at definitions that are subscribed to and the definition that carries the most weight with YOU as an individual, as an agency or as a stakeholder, will determine how you view and execute your role particularly in the anti-corruption landscape.

How you define a concept, determines or acts as an indicator of how you will relate to it.

### ***Let's look at at a few definitions:***

Gang (1998) explains that early European political philosophers defined civil society in the context of the relationship between the state and the society.

- Hobbes and Locke for example, hold that the state originates in, is ultimately answerable to, and is therefore identified with (but not identical to) civil society.
- For Montesquieu and Tocqueville, civil society stands at least partially in opposition to the state.

Others define Civil Society from a social function perspective.

- Fukuyama (1995:8) defines civil society as the realm of spontaneously created social structures separate from the state that underlie democratic political institutions

- Dunn (1996:27) says, "[c]ivil society is broadly regarded as the domain of relationships which falls between the private realm of the family on the one hand and the state on the other".
- Kligman (1990:420) quotes Charles Taylor as defining civil society as "a web of autonomous associations independent of the state, which bind citizens together in matters of common concern, and by their existence or actions could have an effect on public policy"
- Schmitter defines civil society as "[a] set or system of self-organized intermediary groups"(Schmitter 1995:1)

**And finally,**

- "Civil society is the aggregate of non-governmental organizations and institutions that involve diverse cultural, religious, and special interest groups that represent and implement the interests and will of citizens and enforce social norms." (study.com)

Research has classified attitudes towards the usefulness of Civil Society largely into 4:

- The prescriptive universalist view that civil society is desirable as part of the project to build and strengthen democracy around the world. The outcome is then to check the boxes and formulate CSO as much as possible (even perhaps when the approach is not working)
- The Western exceptionalism view that the concept of civil society has little meaning outside Western Europe and North America. This view argues against a cultural expression of Civil Society.... CSO work is for THOSE people
- The adaptive prescriptive approach that there is a middle way between the imposition of the concept from outside and its total abandonment.

The view that this is the wrong question to ask. Civil society has always been relevant to questions of African governance and citizenship as an organising principle, the real question is: what historical processes have shaped civil society and how can they be used to advance the principles

**Question to Ponder #1:** What is your definition of Civil Society and how has that shaped how you tackle your responsibilities specifically as it pertains to Anti-Corruption?

**Question to Ponder #2:** What is the government and statutory body definition of Civil Society and how does that shape what is enabled, supported and encouraged?

## **2. Addressing Corruption**

There is global consensus that Corruption is difficult to address and contain. One of the main reasons touted for this is that Corruption is sneakily cross cutting. Like a many-tentacled creature, Corruption can be found in all industries and sectors, in all communities, in all regions and nations; in varying degrees and subtleties and with varying levels of damaging impact.

The effects of Corruption are felt on a macro and micro scale and while the MACRO arguably garners more attention by its inflammatory nature, it is the MICRO that feeds into the larger picture of the Corruption landscape.

While Anti-Corruption Agencies and Governments toil to create frameworks, policies and programs to address corruption, the truth is that they are limited in the scope of their reach by a macro level view. This is understandable based on the very nature of the work they are entrusted to do.

In a sense, it is difficult (not impossible) for the Elephant to understand the struggle of the Ant. Because of this, there is a need for on-the-ground, heart-of-the-people, grassroots-level education, advocacy, monitoring and mobilization when it comes to Anti-Corruption activities. Civil Society is uniquely positioned to work with and for the people.

### **The Building Analogy**

*Imagine if you will, that a rich owner has purchased a vast building and in that building is a priceless gem that will bring the owner health, wealth, prosperity and posterity.*

*The owner has given charge of the building to a manager and while the building manager has oversight of the whole building, he cannot be in all places at the same time.*

*And so as an added security measure, the building manager has hired security guards and installed sweeping lasers.*

*Each laser has its own field of view and from time to time two or more lasers may intersect.*

*The building manager can rest assured that at any point in time, every area of the building is covered by the guards and the lasers and the gem is well protected. He can report to the people that all is well*

- The owner is the people of the nation
- The building manager is the government
- The gem is the resources, services and rights that citizens have
- The security guards are Anti-Corruption agencies and
- The sweeping lasers are CSOs

The effectiveness of CSOs is in the fact that they are meant to be closer to the issues than larger agencies are. They have first hand, rather than theoretical understanding of the needs and concerns of the people.

Returning to the analogy of the Owner, The Gem, the Manager, Security Guards and Lasers.... We have identified CSOs as being the installed lasers.

What do our Lasers do?

- I. Position themselves to know and effectively communicate the REAL issues that people face with regard to access to resources, services and rights
- II. Direct attention where it is most needed even if the attention is needed OUTSIDE of their area of expertise. This is the value in the intersecting areas of anti-corruption work
- III. Sound the alarm, alerting security guards, building managers and owners of areas where the gem is in danger of being stolen, misused and/or abused
- IV. Demand adequate upgrades in security personnel and protocols in cases where the guards hired are ignoring or exacerbating the security risks
- V. Remind owners that THEY are owners and have the right and the power to demand building managers to do what they have been hired to do.

### **Some Final Thoughts**

It has been my experience that often, people do not advocate for things unless they have been directly impacted by them to a certain degree.

**Think of the young man who fights for anti-discriminatory healthcare because his mother was denied healthcare at a critical time in his life**

**Or the survivor advocacy organizations fighting for rape in peace time to be recognise precisely because they have experienced injustice in this area.**

Why do I bring up these examples you may ask? How is it related to Corruption, Anti-Corruption or to Civil Society?

If you leave CSO work to just ME, I will focus on the education sector and education sector ALONE. Why? Because I have yet to struggle with access to resources in the water sector or in the mining sector. It is for this reason that CSOs, specializing in different areas, are a MUST to make sure that we have well-placed “all-seeing-eyes” on issues that pertain to our people.

Often, Education and advocacy in matters relating to corruption are left to organizations with **specific** mandates to address corruption and yet we can all agree that corruption affects and impacts EVERY organization.

What would it look like for every CSO to very specifically incorporate anti corruption policies, programs and activities tailored to their specific area of expertise? What would it look like for CSOs to do the inward-facing AND outward-acting work required to address, manage and mitigate or eliminate corruption?

It would perhaps be too much to expect every CSO to be able to single-handedly perform every single one of these functions efficiently. This is why it is a MUST that we cooperate, that we communicate and that we consolidate efforts.

Some of us may be best suited for information dissemination, cutting through jargon and allowing the regular citizen to understand the complex discussions, conversations and activities centered around their wellbeing. You are needed in the fight against corruption.

Some are best placed for stimulating discourse and dialogue at high levels, pointing out gaps and deficiencies and motivating for the types of policy changes that bring about reform; you are needed in the fight against corruption.

And yet still, others of us are perfect for being the voice of the voiceless; calling for transparency and integrity and accountability when our citizens cannot, pointing out corrupt acts when our people are unable to recognize them and living with and in integrity ourselves so that the people can begin to understand and recognize what that looks like.

The work of CS and ACAs can seem endless and futile, especially for those who have worked tirelessly for years without visible progress or evidence of transformation. The nature of Anti-Corruption work is that often, the results come YEARS after the groundwork has been laid and the founding actors have passed on. We work in the realm of legacy building and future-focused input that will only take hold when they become historical.

It is easy to get discouraged, but take heart, you are not working in vain. There are so many stories of State, ACA and CSO collaborative wins to encourage, motivate and thank you.

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