

The role of civil society in the democratisation process in botswana

Society



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction

One of the approaches to democratization is the fostering of civil society organizations. Botswana`s civil society organizations have a role to play in the country`s democratization process. As stated by Maundeni (2005) the argument is that the non-partisan character of Botswana`s civic organisations has not prevented them from participating actively in democratising the public space.

In fact civil society has been portrayed as the prime catalyst for promoting democratisation process in developing countries, Africa in particular. This paper attempts to examine the above assertion in Botswana and posits the roles and contributions of civil society to democratisation process.

Concepts And Definitons What Is Civil Society?

The issue of defining what constitutes Civil Society is very controversial; it is defined in various ways. Indeed, the use of these terms in many instances depends on place and time, country and the existing legal framework for registering civil society organizations.

Other factors include membership, mission, and form of organization and levels of operation. The World Bank defines civil society/NGOs as: “ An association, society, foundation, charitable trust, non-profit corporation, or other juridical person that is not regarded under the particular legal system as part of the governmental sector and that is not operated for profit — viz. , if any profits are earned, they are not and cannot be distributed as such. It does not include trade unions, political parties, profit-distributing cooperatives, or churches. According to the Commission of European

<https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-civil-society-in-the-democratisation-process-in-botswana/>

Communities “ Civil society includes the following groups: trade unions and employers’ organizations (social partners); organizations representing social and economic players which are not social partners in the strict sense of the term... non-governmental organizations which bring people together in common cause, such as environmental organizations, human rights organizations, charities, professional associations, grass roots organizations; organizations that involve citizens in local and municipal life with a particular contribution from churches and religious communities.

At one level, civil society can be described as all organized activity not associated with major institutional systems: government and administration, education and health delivery, business and industry, security and organized religion. They include religious/faith based organizations, cooperatives, trade unions, academic institutions, community and youth groups (Judge 1996). Civil societies are therefore created in the public interests and can do things which neither of the other national development actors-the government and the corporate sector-can do on their own.

Civil societies would have as their main objective the improvement in the lives of the poorest and disadvantaged. This is where there is a role for the state: Harriss & de Rienzo (1997) suggest that the role played by civil society organizations will depend on the wider political setting, and on ways in which inequalities of power and resources are dealt with in the economic and political arena.

Democracy

The word is derived from the Greek word demos, which mean people rule. It can be defined as a system where the authority has its legitimacy in the will of what the people have expressed.

Democracy at the same time puts demands on how the people's will should come to expression. Two principles should apply political equality and principles of freedom. The first principle defines political citizenship and focuses on who should be involved in the political process. The second principle concerns freedoms of all kinds of political opinions that may be expressed during the political process. Democratic government aspires to serve under "the people" rather than ruling over them. Implementing some form of a voting system, usually involving indirect representation pursues this ideal.

It shares links with the concept of a republic.

Democratisation

Like Civil society, the definition of democratisation has consistently been subjected to analytical scrutiny by social scientists, in particular, the political scientists. In his definition, Conteh-Morgan (1998) argues that democratisation is an increase in political equality and a decrease in coercive rule. Others argue that democratisation is synonymous to democratic consolidation and or the deepening of democratic practices (Diamond et al; 1995). It implies a process through which a political system becomes democratic.

It is a process that is made up and caused by different factors; these can be connected with political or socio-economic structures and political institutions in which they act. It is a transition to democratic political systems, where democratic systems are taken to be those approximating to universal suffrage, regular elections, a civil society, the rule of law and an independent judiciary.

Civil Society And Democratization Process In Botswana

Civil society can be regarded as organisational life that is voluntary, self-generating, self-supporting, and autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules.

It consists of a vast array of organisations, both formal and informal: interest groups, cultural and religious organisations, civil and developmental associations, issue-oriented movements, the mass media, research and educational institutions, and similar organisations. The difference between these groups and other society groups is that they are concerned with and act in the public realm, relate to the state (without seeking to win control over it), and encompass and respect pluralism and diversity.

Civil society consists out of individuals from different groups who are seeking change within a society. Through organising themselves in various forms of protests to show that they demand their rights, civil society has proved to be powerful when a few societies have transformed from non-democracies into democracies. This implies that the functioning of democracy requires a strong civil society, but a civil society that is politicised, and interacts with the state through concrete participation in decision-making processes.

Types Of Civil Society And Their Contributions To Democratization

Research and Advocacy Groups: these are few without a membership base but effective think-tank research and policy advocacy NGOs. They have easy access to the Botswana policy makers and have established cordial relationship with the foreign donors. Some of these organisations do not only participate in drafting key policy documents for the governments, they also consult for the present regime on governance, economic, security and development issues.

They have contributed significantly through research and advocacy to deepen democratic practices under the present government. In his 2005 edition, Maudeni outlined the role of Democracy Research Project (DRP consisting of academics) in the democratisation process. He showed that the DRP brought together different stakeholders in a way creating a platform where debates would be initiated and set in motion discussion about ways in which Botswana's democracy might be improved. Maundeni reckons thus, the non-partisan DRP seeks to spark a democratisation debate nationally and in fact has done so on past occasions.

It has brought together politicians, academics, civil servants, journalists and traditional chiefs were brought together in a forum in which government politicians and officials did not exercise control over its proceedings. Human Rights and Democracy Advocacy Groups: Women NGOs These organisations advocated for the equality and recognition of women in the society, they were headed by a group of educated and committed women who

provided leadership and who have worked as volunteers to bring these organizations to where they are today.

The groups include Young Women Christian Association, or Botswana Council of Women. Somolokae (1988) relates that these organisations have been dealing with purely welfare matters for decades and they enjoyed a good relationship with the state. Then during the mid-1980s, radical women's groups entered the political scene. Examples here included Emang Basadi, and Metlhaetsile. From the onset, these organizations set out to challenge the state on policy issues. Emang Basadi was formed in 1984 to pressure the government to repeal all legislations which were discriminatory against women.

At first, the reception was bad. Overtime, Emang Basadi together with other NGOs, began to network and push as a united front. When not much progress was being made, the groups under the leadership of Emang Basadi switched focus to a political agenda. The organization came up with a political education project to sensitize women about their political rights, encouraging them to vote for candidates who are committed to addressing the issues and concerns of women. This strategy seems to have worked as more women than ever showed interest in political power.

Ditshwanelo – Botswana Center for Human Rights

The Botswana Centre for Human Rights was established in 1993 and since then has remained the only organisation in Botswana dealing with all aspects of human rights. It advocates for changes in laws, policies and practices, and to raise public awareness of rights and responsibilities and also provide paralegal services to those earning less than the minimum wage.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-civil-society-in-the-democratisation-process-in-botswana/>

Ditshwanelo also targeted its campaigns on the death penalty. In its recent statement commemorating World Day against the Death Penalty on October 10 2012, the NGO remains opposed to the death penalty vows to continue to campaign for its abolition in Botswana. It states that it is particularly concerned about the secretive and arbitrary conduct by the Government of Botswana, in its administration of the death penalty. The group also has partnership with other rights-focused organisations in Botswana, such as those focusing on gender equality or the rights of those affected by HIV/AIDS, complementing the work of its partners, and focusing on issues least supported by others, including the Basarwa / San (Bushmen), sexual minorities and domestic workers. Trade Unions These are organisations established to influence policies in favour of their members.

They are very active in influencing economic and less of political policies. One of the leading and effective members of this group is the Botswana Federation of Public Service Union BOFEPUSU, it is popular in mobilizing workers to go on strike when the need arises and the government is aware of this strength as experienced in 2011. Inaugurating a New Trade Union Education Centre at Gaborone, Botswana on July 10, 1971, President Seretse Khama discussed the role of trade unions - present and future - in his country.

He states “ Free trade unions are an essential instrument of participatory democracy. It is through such unions that the workers can not only defend their interests but also make a positive contribution to national development. And if this contribution is to be effective trade unions must be free. They will not be an effective instrument of participatory democracy if they are

<https://assignbuster.com/the-role-of-civil-society-in-the-democratisation-process-in-botswana/>

manipulated by government, or by a political party or by any external agency. A trade union movement must seek to maintain the confidence of all its members irrespective of party affiliation.

It must not become the agent of a political party. We in Botswana have given trade unions freedom to represent their members' interests and to guide the aspirations of our workers so that they make a productive contribution to national growth. We have not given them freedom to promote the interests of political parties or external powers. " In summary, below are the four broad roles that the civil society has been playing to deepen its contribution to the democratisation processes. Monitoring Role- This varies from one programme and organisation to another.

The monitoring of the executive and legislatures for accountability and good governance for instance are most prevalent among the specialised research and advocacy NGOs while census, elections and budget implementation monitoring are common among the Network and coalitions. They have been performing this role, pointing to mistakes and how governments can overcome such mistakes. Capacity Building Role- Training and sensitization of citizens on their democratic and human rights and how these rights can be protected e. g. the rights of the citizens to hold accountable the elected representatives etc. This capacity building is not restricted to the citizens alone, the elected representatives have also benefited from such trainings e. g. , democratic control of military and security establishments, the making of participatory and gender sensitive budgets etc. Another remarkable, although, ongoing contribution of civil society to the process of

democratisation in Botswana; is the campaign for a new constitution for the country through the convocation of a sovereign national conference.

Disciplinary Role- finally, the civil society has also been mobilising the citizens and call on government to discipline some of the elected representatives and bureaucrats for misconduct while in office through recalls and dismissal (though they have not been successful in this role). More efforts and capacity building- training and fiscal resources are needed to be successful in this role. The challenges of civil society Usually they represent only those sections of the population that are strong and self-aware.

The viewpoints of civil society sometimes are conflicting and contradictory and there is a high possibility of susceptibility to foreign governments or foreign groups particularly if the CSO/NGO receives International funding. Sometimes, people working or serving in civil society are drawn to this sector due to the potential incomes they expect to receive rather than the ideology. This is particularly true with people working in NGOS.

Conclusion

The paper critically analysed the roles and contributions of civil society to the process of democratisation in Botswana and argued that the types of civil society and its advocacy strategies to a large extent determine the level of civil society's contribution to democratic process. Investing in civil society groups whose activities have found resonance with the population is one way to promote the democratization of politics and the full participation of the citizenry in public life.

The civil society must continue to employ a collective advocacy role to mobilize consensus for a national agenda of democratization, peace building and national reconciliation. Moving away from individualized, fragmented and disorganized advocacy to collective advocacy is essential to becoming a strong countervailing force. It can also be concluded that civil society plays a critical role in strengthening democracy in that, it brings about the movement from a bureaucratic administration to a more representative administration.

Civil society brings about active co-operation and an on-going commitment in the process of policy formulation and implementation between politicians, senior management, frontline workers, and citizens. Civil society encourages the divergence from the traditional regime-driven policy process to one where there is a multiplicity of negotiated determinants of the problem identification, formulation of policy principles, setting of objectives, development of options according to agreed criteria, and the formulation of an implementation strategy.

The manner in which this is done and the contribution at various stages in the process characterize democracy. The dynamism of linkages underscored above ascribes to democracy as being about partnerships of all stakeholders in an endeavour to bring about synergies of efforts and resources. The civil society also strengthens democracy through fostering of complex relationships, not only among different institutions of state, but among all the stakeholders, from the most powerful titans to the poorest and most vulnerable people on society's margins

References

1. Commonwealth Foundation (1995): “ Non-Governmental organization: Guidelines for Good Policy and Practice,” London.
2. Conteh-Morgan Earl (1997), Democratization in Africa: the theory and dynamics of political transitions, Preager Pub. Westport, USA
3. Diamond, L; Linz Juan; and Lipset Seymour (1995) Politics in Developing Countries: comparing experiences with democracy (Second Edition), Pub Lynne Rienner, London.
4. Emang Basadi (1998) Political Education Project: A Strategy that Works Gaborone: Lentswe la Lesedi.
5. Judge, A. 1996) Interacting fruitfully with uncivil society: the Dilemma for Non Civil Society Organizations, (Transnational Associations, Washington DC,)
6. Holm J. (1996) “ Development, Democracy and Civil Society in Botswana,” in Leftwitch (ed).
7. Policy Press, U. K.
8. Maundeni Z. (2005) 40 Years of Democracy in Botswana 1965-2005
9. Somolekae G. (1998) Democracy, Civil Society and Governance in Africa : The Case of Botswana
10. The World Bank (1997): International Center for Not-for-profit Law, 1997. Handbook on Good Practices Relating to Non-Governmental Organizations, Washington