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New Directions in State Reform:
Implications for Civil Society in Africa

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◆ Contents

◆ Acknowledgements

◆ Summary/Résumé/Resumen

Summary

There is a gap between the discourse of civil society and the pressures for state reform in many countries in Africa. Whereas civil society discourse celebrates the power of social groups and organizations to contribute to the institutional changes necessary for democracy and development, the debate on state reform cautions against such optimism.

The author of this paper agrees that institutional change and democratization require sustained and enlightened pressures from organized groups in civil society. However, he explains that African economic development and social change have produced fragmented civil societies, and discourses, across countries. Contestation is important. But devoid of efforts to build substantial constitutionality and public sector capacity, it may lead to state collapse or anarchy—not civic power—as Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan show. To be effective, civil society will have to build its own institutional capacity and competence in policy advocacy.

There are also limits to what civic pressure can achieve in the absence of institutional reform of the state system itself. The wide array of public sector reforms under way in Africa has different implications for civil society. The author looks at the range of reforms currently taking place to address three major crises of the state: capacity, governance and security. Reforms of state capacity tend to be market and management oriented, while whose of governance and security are concerned with political equity and participation. They call for varying forms of engagement between organized groups in civil society, state institutions and policy makers.

This paper also considers theoretical debates around the concept of civil society. Civil society has no widely agreed definition—should, for instance, market-based agents or, indeed, every non-state institution qualify as part of civil society? There is also controversy over how to categorize different civic groups, such as religious bodies or public sector interest groups—as well as fundamentalist movements that seek to impose "uncivic" practices.

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Résumé

Il existe un hiatus entre le discours de la société civile et les pressions visant à réformer l'Etat dans de nombreux pays d'Afrique. Tandis que, dans son discours, la société civile célèbre le pouvoir qu'ont organisations et groupes sociaux de participer aux changements institutionnels nécessaires à la démocratie et au développement, le débat sur la réforme de l'Etat met en garde contre un tel optimisme.

L'auteur de ce document admet que des pressions constantes et éclairées de la part de groupes organisés de la société civile sont nécessaires à un changement des institutions et à la démocratisation. Il explique cependant que le développement économique et le changement social en Afrique ont entraîné une fragmentation des sociétés civiles et des discours et que ce schéma est le même d'un pays à l'autre. La contestation est importante. Mais si l'on ne s'attache pas à construire une réelle constitutionnalité et à renforcer les capacités du secteur public, elle peut entraîner

l'effondrement de l'Etat ou l'anarchie - et non pas créer un pouvoir citoyen - comme on l'a vu récemment au Libéria, en Sierra Leone, en Somalie et en Afghanistan. Pour être efficace, la société civile devra renforcer ses propres capacités institutionnelles et étendre ses compétences en matière de défense des politiques.

Il y a aussi des limites à ce que la pression des citoyens peut obtenir si le système de l'Etat lui-même n'est pas inclus dans les réformes institutionnelles. Les réformes très diverses du secteur public entreprises en Afrique ont des répercussions différentes sur la société civile. L'auteur examine l'éventail des réformes engagées actuellement pour sortir l'Etat de trois crises graves: crises des capacités, de la gouvernance et de la sécurité. Les réformes des capacités de l'Etat tendent à être axées sur le marché et la gestion, alors que les réformes touchant à la gouvernance et à la sécurité sont soucieuses d'équité politique et de participation. Elles appellent des formes d'engagement différentes de la part des groupes organisés de la société civile, des institutions de l'Etat et des décideurs.

L'auteur s'intéresse aussi aux débats théoriques sur la notion de société civile. Il n'existe pas de définition de la société civile qui soit largement acceptée. Devrait-on par exemple compter dans la société civile les acteurs présents sur le marché ou, pourquoi pas, tous les établissements non publics? Dans quelle catégorie ranger divers groupes de citoyens tels que les organismes religieux, les groupes d'intérêt du secteur public ou les mouvements intégristes qui cherchent à imposer des pratiques qui n'ont rien de "citoyennes"? Cette question aussi prête à controverse.

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Resumen

Hay una brecha entre el discurso sobre sociedad civil y las presiones para reformar el estado en muchos países de Africa. Si bien el discurso sobre sociedad civil encomia el poder que tienen los grupos y las organizaciones sociales de contribuir a realizar los cambios necesarios para lograr la democracia y el desarrollo, el debate sobre la reforma del estado advierte cautela sobre ese optimismo.

El autor de este documento está de acuerdo en que para lograr el cambio institucional y la democratización se requiere ejercer una presión sostenida y sustentada en el conocimiento por parte de los grupos organizados de la sociedad civil. Sin embargo, explica que el desarrollo económico y el cambio social han generado la fragmentación de sociedades civiles y de discursos en muchos de los países africanos. El debate es importante, pero sin los esfuerzos para forjar un régimen constitucional sólido y para mejorar la capacidad del sector público, el resultado puede ser el colapso del estado o la anarquía, en lugar del poder cívico, tal como lo demuestran las experiencias recientes de Liberia, Sierra Leona, Somalia y Afganistán. Para ser efectiva, la sociedad civil tendrá que forjar su propia capacidad institucional y destreza en la promoción de políticas.

Lo que puede lograr la presión cívica tiene también límites si no hay una reforma institucional del propio sistema estatal. El amplio margen de reformas al sector público que se está llevando a cabo en Africa, tiene diferentes implicaciones para la sociedad civil. El autor revisa la gama de reformas que están siendo aplicadas actualmente para hacer frente a tres crisis principales del estado: capacidad, gestión de buen gobierno y seguridad. Se tiende a orientar las reformas a la capacidad del estado, hacia el mercado y la administración, mientras que las que corresponden a

gestión de gobierno y seguridad se refieren más a la equidad política y a la participación. En cada caso, se requieren formas diversas de compromiso entre grupos organizados de la sociedad civil, instituciones estatales y formuladores de políticas.

En este documento también se toman en consideración los debates teóricos sobre el concepto de sociedad civil. No hay un acuerdo amplio sobre la definición de sociedad civil. Por ejemplo, ¿los agentes sustentados en el mercado (o en realidad, toda institución no estatal), deberían calificar como parte de la sociedad civil? Hay también controversia sobre la forma de categorizar a los diferentes grupos cívicos, tales como entidades religiosas o grupos de interés del sector público, al igual que a los movimientos sociales fundamentalistas que pretenden imponer prácticas no cívicas a la población.

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INTRODUCTION

◆ The Reinvention of Civil Society

The concept of civil society has gained much prominence in the development debate of the 1990s. White's conceptual article, "Civil society, democratisation and development" (1994), brings out the competing, often ambiguous, strands in the definition and use of the concept. There is controversy over what to include: whether, for instance, market-based institutions or, indeed, every non-state organization qualifies as part of the concept's definitional set. In addition, there is the question of how to categorize supposedly civic institutions—such as state-regulated religious bodies, academic unions, and public sector interest groups—whose members are state employees and, therefore, may be subject to special public rules and regulations. Indeed, in Nordic countries where about 50 per cent of the population derives its core income from the state, it could be argued that much of civil society is embedded in the state system itself.

Critics have also debated the issue of whether civil society should be treated separately from political society, as scholars with a Gramscian orientation to state-society relations have often maintained; and whether, indeed, only organizations that directly engage the state should be seen as constituting civil society. There is also the problem of how to categorize fundamentalist groups and movements that seek to impose "uncivic" or doctrinal practices on state and society, which ultimately may destroy civil society itself. In the African context, one must add the evidently parochial orientation of the discourse, which tends to limit discussion of civil society to organized secular groups in urban settings.

Despite these ambiguities, it is safe to conclude that the concept's revival in political theory in the late 1980s was primarily associated with the belief that it provided a powerful tool to confront the authoritarian forms of rule that regimes in developing and centrally-planned communist countries had established during much of the post-war period. Keane's Civil Society and the State (1988) is still one of the best texts on the philosophical traditions of the concept and the early efforts to revive it in the service of democratic reforms. In the 1980s, civil society was associated with *empowerment, democratization* and *participation.* It was believed that social groups, viewpoints and institutions that were either previously excluded from policy making processes, or enjoyed limited spaces to influence the activities of the public domain, would gain voice, legality, strength and autonomy from the repressive grip of the state.

Since civil society deals with a myriad of non-state organizations of varying memberships and interests, comparisons were often made with the libertarian features of markets. Critics maintained that since no single organization dominated civil society, its growth was likely to lead to dispersal of authority, emergence of multiple centres of social power, and limits to the authority and power of states. Democratic regimes that pursue socially accountable public policies and uphold the rule of law were, thus, likely to emerge when civil society institutions and actors grew faster than, or took over some of the authority and functions of, the state.

Most scholars, social movements and global development agencies have essentially been attracted to the libertarian and, by extension, democratic content of the

concept. Civil society has become one of the key crosscutting issues used to define the global development agenda, which has remarkably been detached from the organizing principles of the dominant ideologies of the cold war era. Indeed, the emerging global civil society movement, which comprises mainly developmental, gender, environmental and human rights NGOs, has eclipsed the so-called new social movements of the 1980s and the old class-based, or production-oriented, corporatist organizations. Global networking; promotion of citizenship and consumer rights; flexible, issue-oriented discourses; open dialogue with dominant institutions and agents of power; and avoidance of grand theories in the pursuit of development goals seem to be the defining features of the new global civil society movement.

Interestingly, the new civil society focus is not in conflict with the objectives of the global financial institutions, even though aspects of the concept's libertarian thrust may be used to challenge market-based property relations. In the view of global financial institutions, civil society can serve as a tool for better macroeconomic governance in countries where aid conditionality for structural adjustment has not produced the desired results. In this case, the campaign for civil society forms part of a wider bundle of reforms in the public sector for the introduction of market-oriented public management methods. The groups in civil society that will spearhead these reforms are technocrats, NGOs and the private sector—not political parties, trade unions or conventional professional associations.

Some scholars and social movements with radical orientations have challenged this developmental thrust of civil society. Most, however, would recognize the opportunities that the concept offers for opening up public spaces for alternative ideas and forms of organization. In places that have experienced high levels of violence and militarization, civil society may, indeed, be concerned about recreating or reconstituting the basic values of social etiquette and civic behaviour (Ibrahim, 1998).

◆ Over-Estimated Social Forces and the Despised State

If the concept of civil society has enjoyed much favourable support across the development spectrum, the same cannot be said for the state. Two influential strands in the literature on the African state account for the limited attention that has been accorded to state reform. The first is derived from a section of radical political economy, which challenged the lack of respect that the African state and its ruling classes were believed to have experienced in dependency and neopatrimonial theories of the state. Radical political economists critiqued the *economic stagnation* thesis of underdevelopment theory—made famous by Andre Gunder Frank, Paul Baran and Samir Amin. These writers had claimed that global capitalism, or *imperialism*, blocked rather than promoted the development of the productive forces of developing countries.

In challenging this view, the radical political economy discourse adopted a growth-oriented, classical Marxian view of development, which recognized economic crises as temporary or cyclical setbacks in the process of accumulation. It was believed that such setbacks did not fundamentally affect class formation and long-term economic development. Warren (1980) more generally, and Sender and Smith (1986) in the African context, provided empirical data that tried to show that colonialism was a progressive force in dominated countries. Radical political economists questioned the Warrenite notion of *imperial progress* but embraced the

2

growth dimensions of the argument, which was central to the analysis of class formation, state power and politics. State capacity and bureaucratization were seen essentially as products of accumulation and social pressures. There was no need, therefore, to pose the issue of state reform even for developing countries with weak state institutions, since it was believed that ruling classes would be rational enough to manage the state efficiently. After all, the state, in orthodox Marxist theory, is first and foremost an institution of class domination. It primarily serves the interests of ruling classes, and is essential to their growth and prosperity. From this perspective, it would appear to be suicidal for ruling classes to ignore the necessity to develop state capacity since their entire class project depended upon it.

In three well-argued and notable pieces on the Nigerian and wider African contexts, Beckman posited an ineluctable process of organizational capacity building and professionalization in the class institutions of workers and employers as the Nigerian and other African economies expanded in the 1970s and 1980s (Beckman, 1982; 1988a; 1988b). It was believed that economic expansion, professionalism and class struggles would ultimately discipline ruling classes and policy makers, forcing them to make the state more efficient, increase its capabilities and ensure that it becomes accountable to social interests. Part of the argument is very similar to the popular thesis on the developmental states of East Asia, which were said to have developed, by the 1970s, highly effective, technocratic bureaucracies to guide the process of internal capitalist development and relations with the world market.[1] The main focus in the perspective of radical political economy was on state formation—driven by class forces—rather than on state reform, which was seen as mangerial and requiring special policy instruments to be applied to both state and society. We shall call this the *accumulation-driven, social activism* perspective of state reform.

The second strand of thought is the neopatrimonial theory of the state. Patrimonialism is defined as a system of resource distribution that ties recipients and clients to the strategic goals of benefactors. In neopatrimonial relationships, both patrons and clients rely essentially on personal networks and loyalty, rather than on rational-legal bureaucratic rules, in the distribution of "patrimony" or public resources (Sandbrook, 1985; Hyden, 1983). Given the interventionist role of the African state at independence—as a producer, employer, regulator, tax collector, and provider of social services and basic infrastructure—politicians and special interest groups accorded the state a high value in their accumulation and livelihood strategies (Bates, 1981). It was argued that neopatrimonial, rent-seeking methods defined the basic strategies employed by these groups and actors for accessing the expanding public resources and opportunities.

Thus, unlike the progressive slant enjoyed by popular struggles under the framework of accumulation and social activism, scholars who focused on neopatrimonial relations viewed such struggles as anti-developmental and eventually destructive of state capacity and professionalism. A growth industry of unsavory epithets on the African state gained prominence under this discourse (Mkandawire, 1997). The African state was described as a "lame leviathan", "a

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[1] There is a key difference, however, between radical political economy and the thesis on the developmental state. The latter stresses the insulation of the state from social forces, with bureaucrats enjoying enormous powers to discipline social class forces; the former gives much weight to the social class forces themselves in explaining the development and behaviour of states.

shadow state", "a predatory state", "a crony state", or a state that promotes "the politics of the belly".

The economic crisis of the 1980s and the informalization of African economies spawned a new set of writings on state-society relations, which carried neopatrimonial perspectives to their logical policy conclusions (Chazan, 1988; Rothchild and Chazan, 1988). These writings extolled the growth of the informal sector—seen essentially as a revolt of civil society against an incompetent, decaying and increasingly irrelevant state. In this sense, neopatrimonial perspectives converged with, or provided a context for, the application of extreme forms of neoliberalism in the 1980s. Indeed, the early programmes of structural adjustment ignored or downplayed the need for state reconstruction as a condition for successful market reforms. In the ideological climate of the times, it was markets and business-oriented groups in civil society that needed to be liberated, empowered or reformed—not the state.

This paper seeks to challenge the seemingly unlimited powers of transformatory politics and institution building that have been accorded to civil society in the democratization and development debate. It supports the view that institutional change and democratization require sustained and enlightened pressures from organized groups in civil society. However, the favourable growth-oriented conditions of the 1970s that encouraged professionalism and institutional capacity among the principal class organizations that would have led to an accumulation-driven process of state development needs to be re-examined in the light of the crisis of the 1980s and 1990s. Current developments in African economies and social change, which have produced fragmented civil societies and discourses across countries, suggest that there is a limit to what civic pressures can achieve in the absence of institutional reforms in the state system itself.

Although state reforms themselves require purposeful inputs and demands from civil society, these inputs and demands do not have a single logic and purpose, and cannot be reduced to a simple issue of political contestation. Contestation is important. But devoid of efforts that are oriented toward the building of substantial constitutionality and public sector capacity, contestation may lead to state collapse or anarchy—not civic power. Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan provide useful lessons. The reforms that are under way in most African countries call for varying forms of engagement between organized groups in civil society and state institutions and policy makers. In the final analysis, an effective civil society requires the building of its own institutional capacity and competence in policy advocacy.

PATTERNS OF STATE RECONSTRUCTION

The African state currently suffers from three major crises: *a crisis of capacity*; *a crisis of governance*; and *a crisis of security*. The capacity crisis relates to the fiscal basis of the state; administrative inefficiency; and erosion of incentive structures for staff motivation, favourable work ethics and state loyalty. The governance crisis deals with the failure to develop institutions or rules of competition that would encourage politicians and pressure groups to conduct politics through constitutional as opposed to violent methods, which have characterized much of the politics of transition to democracy. The security crisis highlights the social and physical effects of organized and random violence in the 1990s. These have taken a

high toll on the social fabric and civic culture of many societies, both in rural and urban areas. They stem from the high levels of militarization of both the state and society, and the continued interference of the military in the governance of the civic public. We shall examine the various discourses and reforms that address these three broad sets of crises.

In general, there is a lack of correspondence or convergence between the discourse of civil society and the pressures for state reform in many countries in Africa and elsewhere. Whereas the civil society discourse celebrates the power of social groups and organizations in facilitating the necessary institutional changes for democracy and development, the debate on state reform cautions against such optimism. Underlying the state reform discourse is the need for civil society groups to understand the limitations of extra-constitutional forms of political competition, and to view public sector reforms as a process that may require new forms of engagement between such groups and the state. It calls into question the narrow dichotomization of the state and civil society, especially the discourse that sees a trade-off between the growth of civil society organizations and the powers of the state.

Some aspects of state sector reforms, such as those relating to new public management, may require new forms of civic pressures and willingness to accept or promote new tax regimes that will reduce the dependence of the state on foreign sources of revenue. Others, such as those relating to the military apparatus of the state, may require a fusion of state and society to overcome the chronic problems that military establishments have created for democratic reforms and political stability. Reforms that are aimed at power sharing call for new types of political competition or dialogue between civic groups, leading political parties and armed movements if tensions in the political system are to be contained. Yet other reforms, such as decentralization, require a dispersal of both political and civic power, and co-operative relations between the various levels of government and among civic organizations in order to nurture a universal civic order at both central and local levels. In the following sections, we examine three main forms of state reforms that are linked to the three sets of crises we have highlighted. We also try to address briefly some of the implications of reform for organized groups in civil society.

◆ The Crisis of State Capacity: New Public Management Reforms

The economic crisis and market reforms of the 1980s have produced new methods of public sector management with implications for the role of civil society organizations in the governance of the public domain. New public management reforms seek to reconfigure the relations between states, markets and societies by giving prominence to market forces, managerial efficiency and accountable government. The content and direction of the reforms reveal, however, contradictory forms of engagement with civil society. During much of the post-independence period, it was taken as a given that African states had an important role to play in promoting macroeconomic stability, stimulating growth, redistributing incomes, providing social welfare, and developing basic physical infrastructure and infant industries. The size, functions and powers of states grew in most countries; use of markets competed with administrative methods in the allocation of resources; and a variety of corporate, clientelist and authoritarian arrangements provided the basis for industrial and political stability.

The new public management approach questions these state-centric methods of governing the public realm by according substantial weight to market forces in the allocation of resources. Starting in the developed market economies, which experienced deep-seated fiscal crises during the 1970s, these reforms were extended to developing countries in the 1980s and 1990s through the World Bank's structural adjustment loans (SALs) and technical assistance loans (TALs). The number of civil service reforms supported by the World Bank in Africa in the 1980s was twice that for all developing countries combined. At the end of the twentieth century, new public management reforms have gained prominence in debates about the configuration of state and society relations. The post-independence interventionist state has been blamed for the high budget deficits, spiralling inflation rates, negative growth, rent-seeking behaviour and the civil wars that have racked many countries. To stabilize the crisis and foster economic growth, market and managerial reforms are to be promoted not only in the private economy but also within the state sector itself. The approach adopted for the public sector has three main elements.

Downsizing and subcontracting

The first focuses on the need to reduce the size of the state. This is to be pursued through expenditure controls—withdrawing subsidies from basic goods and services, reducing the number of civil service staff, and privatizing government businesses. The World Bank reports that by 1996 about 2,700 privatizations, with a sales value of $2.7 billion, had occurred in Africa. Relative to Latin America, Eastern Europe and OECD countries, this is a very small amount. Besides, about half of the sales value and two thirds of the privatization transactions are accounted for by only 10 countries: Ghana, Nigeria, Mozambique, Zambia, Uganda, Benin, Kenya, Togo, Madagascar and Burkina Faso; and most of the transactions were restricted to small- and medium-sized firms. However, if one places these transactions in historical perspective, clear shifts seem to be taking place in the African state's involvement in business activities. In 1990 only 12 countries had undertaken privatization measures; this figure doubled in 1993; and by 1996 only five countries had not privatized any of their parastatals (White and Bhatia, 1998).

The second element of the approach deals with a redefinition of the role of the state: it is to be stripped of its traditions of universalism in service provisioning by encouraging the private and voluntary sectors to play active roles. Through competitive bidding, the state is to contract-out its activities to private sector institutions. In some cases, private companies may be hired to manage, for instance, solid waste disposal or water distribution, with the public sector controlling the enterprise and the staff. In other cases, private firms may be given contracts to supply temporary staff or workers for specific government tasks. Other forms of subcontracting may include the award of contracts to private firms and quasi- or non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to manage, using their own staff, services that were previously provided by the state—such as health, education, road construction and security. Indeed, municipal services in a number of countries are now being contracted-out as part of wider efficiency-enhancing public sector reforms (Larbi, 1999; Batley, 1996; World Bank, 1997). This has led to an explosion of service-oriented NGOs, especially in countries where private sector response to reforms is relatively weak. Ghana, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Zambia stand out among African countries that have been at the forefront in implementing these reforms.

Managerial efficiency

The third approach to the reform of the state concerns efficiency issues. The goal is to make the public sectors of crisis states operate like modern business enterprises, even though the routes taken vary considerably among countries. Business management methods to be utilized in changing the state's administrative culture include decentralization of management systems through conversion of large civil service bureaucracies into executive agencies. Under such arrangements, managers, who are on fixed-term contracts, enjoy considerable flexibility in allocating resources, as well as in hiring and firing staff. Decentralized management also means decentralized budgets, underpinned by an array of performance and output indicators, for which managers are held responsible.

New methods of monitoring staff performance and linking rewards or promotion to performance also constitute part of the package. These are often accompanied by new salary structures that are skewed in favour of those at the top management levels. Similarly, rules and controls may be established to ensure transparency in the budgetary process. The new agencies are often headed by boards of directors expected to operate like corporate governors in competitive business establishments, with minimum interference from elected representatives of the public, interest groups and labour leaders (Ferlie et al., 1996). Reforms dealing with downsizing and subcontracting have had more impact in Africa than those relating to managerial efficiency. But there are clear trends that the latter are likely to grow.

Aspects of the new managerial reforms are already under way in countries like Ghana, Uganda, Zambia, Tanzania and Mozambique. In Uganda, a major restructuring exercise is under way that will involve a transfer of all "non-core" state activities to the private sector. It has been reported that 12 out of the country's 22 ministries have lost 50 per cent of their functions since 1995; and it is envisaged that at the end of the reform exercise there will be 107 ministry-specific autonomous and semi-autonomous agencies (Therkildsen, 1999). A process of corporatization is also evident in Ghana, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Ghana—especially in the health, water and roads sectors, where autonomous service boards or agencies are being created (Larbi, 1998). These countries have experienced heavy World Bank involvement in their economic reform programmes.

Another aspect of public management reforms is the introduction of cash budgeting, or getting governments to spend what they actually collect as revenue. It forms part of wide-ranging reforms in the aid programmes of donor governments, which are increasingly unwilling to support the recurrent costs of countries receiving aid. Carlson (1998), Bolnick (1997) and Therkildsen (1999) report that Zambia, Tanzania, Uganda and Malawi have implemented this policy in recent years, with improved government incentives to collect revenue. In Zambia, an autonomous Joint Data Monitoring Committee, comprising officials from the finance ministry and central bank, was established to monitor, on a daily basis, fiscal and monetary data, and recommend measures for rectifying problems (Bolnick, 1997). Cash budgeting has led to a radical reduction of government expenditures especially in Zambia, Uganda and Tanzania. In a good number of countries, revenue and tax offices are being converted into autonomous agencies with considerable freedom to carry out their mandates (Carlson, 1998; IMF, 1998).

Implications for civil society

New public management reforms pose a number of challenges to the developmental and nationalist mission of the African state (Olukoshi, 1998a), as well as the discourse and growth of civil society. Many of the goals of new public management—efficiency, accountability and consumer choice—are necessary for state capacity, service delivery and a properly functioning civil society. The interests of affected groups are not, however, effectively built into the reform programmes. In a context of weak alternative livelihoods in the private sector, absence of adequate social protection or safety nets, the long period of gestation of institutional reforms, and poor governmental track records in managing reforms of any type, losers are bound to be sceptical about what is being proposed.

Downsizing, for instance, threatens the viability of public sector unions, which in Africa are known to have played major roles in the evolution of civil society. The density of public sector wage employment, union membership, and contributions to union funds have suffered considerably as a result of the macroeconomic crisis and the state sector reforms. Data on retrenchment in Africa have not been systemically collected. Surprisingly, even the World Bank, which has guided most of the pay and employment reforms in the continent (Nunberg, 1994), has not gathered statistics. Some countries, such as Uganda and Ghana, have reduced the size of their civil service staff by 40 and 50 per cent; others, such as Zimbabwe, have cut public sector employment by about 12 per cent or less. For many countries, however, retrenchment is often offset by new forms of recruitment, or what has been called "manpower substitution" (McCourt, 1999): staff volunteer to take severance pay and are subsequently engaged as consultants. Despite these practices, recent data collected by Schiavo-Campo (1998) suggest that central government employment in Africa fell from 1.8 per cent of the population in 1980 to 1.1 per cent in the early 1990s. The wage bill as a proportion of GDP fell from 10.8 per cent to 7.9 per cent over the same period.

It is important to note that as the largest employer of labour, the African state provided the enabling environment for the development of trade unionism in Africa. Public sector unions were central to the anti-colonial struggles of the 1950s. And despite attempts by governments to regulate them at independence through corporatist arrangements and developmentalist ideologies, public sector unions retained much autonomy and vigour in advancing livelihood, equity and governance issues (Hashim, 1994). They provided leadership to the burgeoning private sector unions on issues such as wage settlements, rights of unionization and welfare benefits. They were also at the forefront of the wide-ranging campaigns against structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and the ensuing calls for constitutional democracy in the 1990s. Indeed, in the African context, it was these campaigns that weakened the authority of the state and spawned the debate about an emerging civil society and the need for democratic reforms—not NGOs and market institutions (Olukoshi, 1998b; Beckman, 1992).

However, the sustained protests of the 1980s against downsizing seem to have tapered off in the 1990s, as unions have been forced to accommodate the logic of retrenchment and privatization in exchange for severance pay or "the golden handshake", various compensatory funds and training schemes that were meant to resettle workers in the private sector. This has occurred despite evidence of growing poverty and diminishing access to, and quality and quantity of, social services. The limited ways in which the private sector has responded to the reforms, even in countries where growth rates have been high, has meant that a

central pillar of civil society—organized labour—has been on the retreat in much of Africa. It is important to note that labour unions in Africa constitute one of the few non-state institutions that have been national in composition and character. They have historically articulated and embodied civic values even though ethnic considerations have sometimes influenced elections of representatives. Their current decline under the weight of recession and new public management reforms may weaken efforts to shape the evolving civil society in the direction of a civic-based, as opposed to an ethnic-based, social order.

Efforts to break up the public sector into executive agencies, as well as subcontracting of services to private and non-governmental sectors, pose additional problems. On one hand, administrative reforms seek to concentrate power in the hands of new managers in the newly established agencies at the expense of the workforce and public sector unions. This may undermine dialogical methods of collective bargaining in a crucial area of the modern African public. Participatory institutions, such as the Consultative Labour Councils in Zambia and Zimbabwe and the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) in South Africa, which have tried to promote consensus in policy making, may well have been weakened by these reforms. Studies suggest that the governments of Zambia and Zimbabwe are increasingly being alienated from core support groups, the labour unions, which are opposed to the reforms (Sachikonye, 1998; Simutanyi, 1996). Opposition to reforms has provoked anti-union legislation. Compulsory union membership and the check-off system were abolished by the Zambian government in 1993 (Akwetey, forthcoming). This was the year the government introduced its rigorous cash budget (Bolnick, 1997), which took a toll on government expenditures, including funding of core activities widely believed to have been badly managed.

The reforms may encourage the development of a new technocracy in policy making that is not accountable to society and emerging national legislatures. Indeed, the Bretton Woods institutions, bilateral donor agencies and, to a lesser extent, global financial markets, to which African states have become overly indebted, have gained strength in the structure of accountability. The new policy-making actors are expected to have specialist knowledge about macroeconomic stabilization and commitment to the core values of neoliberalism. Central aspects of public policy—such as the emerging autonomy of central banks and the setting of interest rates, the relative sizes of budget deficits, the progressive liberalization of trade and financial markets, and the mobilization of special taxes for some public services—are increasingly being screened off from the pressures of civil society and elected representatives (Mkandawire, 1999).

In addition, there are long-term negative implications for organized civil society in the reforms that deal with administrative restructuring. These, in essence, seek to promote a fragmented and populist-oriented civil society. Indeed, the reforms themselves have been justified as inherently demand-led and pro-people: consumers rather than bureaucrats will determine the quality and range of services to be provided. Where they function properly, the new reforms will, in other words, bring public service closer to the people. The reforms are said to empower consumers and small-scale organizations that have flexible work practices and low overhead costs. Consumer organizations and community or civic pressures for the delivery of good public services are, however, very weak in most countries. The so-called Citizen Charter, made famous in the United Kingdom under the Thatcher/Major public sector reforms, is yet to take root in African countries. Only in South Africa have there been efforts to set up a similar body. But even here, the

Batho Pele (People First) initiative, which is aimed at getting citizen involvement in discussions about the level and quality of public service, is relatively new. Service delivery surveys that are partly run by CIET-International—an international NGO concerned about community participation in planning and good governance—exist in Uganda, Tanzania, Mali, Zambia and Zimbabwe. But there is no evidence that results have empowered citizens or positively influenced the way the public sector relates to customers.

Instead, the populism of current public management reforms may pitch civil society advocacy groups against atomized consumers and service-provisioning NGOs that have benefited from the reforms. Unlike previous situations where civil society was largely equated with a few organized interest groups of labour, professional associations, student unions and informal sector associations, the social plurality and fragmentation that the new public administration reforms generate may complicate the question of who has legitimacy to speak for the public. Some of those who have studied the United Kingdom experience—the cradle of new public management reforms—conclude that the reforms have produced higher, not lower, forms of state intervention, cronyism and political corruption.

Furthermore, as has been pointed out by many critics of such reforms, individualistic, consumer-based approaches to service delivery may render collective action difficult. They may also introduce new forms of social exclusion as the new service providers focus on social groups that have a better capacity to pay for services (Mackintosh, 1997; Vivian, 1995). In addition, the opportunities offered by contracting-out arrangements to NGOs may undermine the scope for purposeful civic action in the governance of the public domain. Organizations that derive their incomes and livelihoods from the new arrangements in the public sector may prefer to protect access and may be less willing to advocate political reforms that may undermine those relationships. Does this explain why the phenomenal growth of organizations in civil society has not led to qualitative changes in relations between governments and citizens, or the deepening of democratic reforms in Africa and, indeed, elsewhere?

Civil society needs a strong fiscal base

One major factor that drives new public management reforms is the heavy dependence of African states on external sources of funds. In some countries, such dependence has reached alarming proportions. Governments will hardly function in countries such as Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Tanzania and Rwanda, where aid-to-government expenditure ratios are reckoned to be 60 per cent or more. The capacity of African governments to raise the value of domestically generated revenue has been seriously eroded by economic crisis, deteriorating terms of trade for raw materials and capital flight. Most countries depend upon international trade taxes and, to some extent, domestic consumption taxes for their revenue. Data on income tax for a sample of 18 countries suggest that governments derive about a third of their revenue from this source (Zee, 1996). However, two thirds of this figure is accounted for by corporate profit, not personal income tax.

Mkandawire (1995) has developed an interesting typology of state-society relations based on the different ways African states raise their revenue—rentier- and merchant-based ways—and the strength or weakness of their civil societies. Four contrasting ideal types are highlighted that help to explain variations in country

responses to economic recession and democratization. Rentier states are said to be dependent upon mineral rents and foreign aid, while merchant states raise their revenues by extracting surpluses from mercantile activities, such as marketing boards. Nigeria, Congo, Zambia, Angola, Botswana, Cameroon and Gabon represent the first; and Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Malawi, Mali and Mauritius represent the second. Civil society is characterized as either strong or weak, and on the basis of the strength or weakness of organized interest groups and associations. Zambia, Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana are categorized as having strong civil societies; and Malawi, Côte d'Ivoire, Botswana and former Zaire are said to have weak civil societies.

Rentier states with weak civil societies have generally insulated governing regimes from the pressures of domestic social actors. In this case, the state tends to act as a benevolent or paternalistic provider when it engages in distributive policies. On the other hand, rentier states with strong civil societies are deeply immersed in social struggles to distribute the state's rents. The state is not a benevolent provider, but is pressed by social forces to engage in redistributive policies. Merchant states with weak civil societies do not have a strong peasant economy, and are often under very limited pressure to use peasant surpluses to pursue welfare policies for urban constituencies. Adjustment is, thus, unlikely to provoke organized resistance from urban groups. On the other hand, merchant states with strong civil societies have historically used peasant surpluses to support the development and welfare needs of urban social groups. These groups are likely to resist adjustment programmes that seek to curtail such benefits through expenditure controls and pricing policies.

The import of the argument is to draw attention to the need to understand the fiscal basis of African states and possibilities for civic groups to impress themselves upon the state's project—whether it is on structural adjustment, social welfare provisioning or democratization. A state that does not have to worry about collecting revenue for its core activities from organized local society is unlikely to listen to the voices of its citizens in the formulation of public policy. Such a state is more likely to be accountable to foreign donor institutions and governments. By extension, a civil society that is increasingly dependent upon the same external sources for funds may find it difficult to disengage the state from some of the extreme forms of public management reforms that are being implemented on the continent. Taxation is the foundation of citizenship. It gives legitimacy to the body of rights that citizens routinely demand from policy makers. It emboldens citizen groups to search for, and suggest, appropriate ways in which state officials may use or not use their taxes. The problem is that current tax reforms, which are being supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), are heavily top-down. The goal in most countries that are implementing tax reforms is to improve state revenue rather than facilitate citizen participation in shaping the evolution of the tax system and state spending plans. This may explain why the reforms tend to be unpopular in many countries despite real gains in increasing government revenue. In Ghana, the reforms on value-added tax led to mass riots and cancellation of the reforms (Terkper, 1997).

Experiences elsewhere have shown that many of the features of new public management are not inevitable outcomes in the quest for state reconstruction. Indeed, the findings in Tendler's Good Government in the Tropics (1997), which looks at four case studies of service provisioning in the Ceara region of Brazil, turn the new public management reforms on their head: the public sector can be effective even when it expands and the central government is mandated to deliver service at local levels. Good performance comes from motivating and improving

the status of the workforce; providing workers with multiple skills, tasks and discretion; respecting and working with unions; and developing healthy and reciprocal relations between government workers and communities.

◆ The Crisis of Governance: The Distribution of State Power

New public management reforms require a functioning and stable political order. A legitimate political order allows groups in society to compete for governmental power without resorting to violence. A violently contested political order always restricts the scope for civil society organizations to be influential in the restructuring of the public domain. Where legitimate state structures have collapsed and violence has emerged as the preferred mode for structuring political claims, it is warlords, bandits and lumpen individuals who are likely to be empowered at the expense of organized civic groups. The experiences of countries like Lebanon, Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan offer useful lessons.

In Liberia, despite the proliferation of NGOs and community organizations during seven years of civil war, and efforts by a regional peacekeeping force to install a civic-based government under the successive leaderships of Amos Sawyerr, Wilton Sankawulo, Chief Tamba Taylor and Ruth Perry, it was warlords like Charles Taylor, Roosevelt Johnson, Alhaji Kroma and George Boley who continued to call the shots until the elections of July 1997. Even when an internationally reputed personality, Elen Johnson Sirleaf (former director of the Africa Division of the United Nations Development Programme), entered the race to give voice and hope to civic society, it was the men with arms who emerged victorious. The populace was so traumatized by seven years of violence that it placed short-term security issues above other considerations of civic culture and democratic development. It thus opted to vote into office the party of the strongest warlord—Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia—with the hope of some measure of peace after the elections. Voters who were interviewed before the elections stated that they would only vote for individuals who were thoroughly schooled in the use of guns. This disqualified Sirleaf and other candidates whose support base was in civil society organizations.

The restructuring of the African state has thus also focused on the question of how to distribute and manage the institutions of state power. Formal democratization— which essentially is about plural competitive politics—was originally thought to provide an enabling environment for the management of power and stability. However, it is now widely recognized that formal democracy does not address distributional issues, and may ignite latent social tensions if not backed by further institutional reforms. Indeed, formal democratization can reproduce—even create—social and economic inequalities. In situations where a single ethnic group enjoys an absolute demographic majority, it is very possible for formal democracy to produce all, or a disproportionate number, of its political representatives from the dominant ethnic group (Horowitz, 1985). In such situations, the votes of minority groups may not carry the same weight as those of the majority, and minorities may be inclined to rely on non-constitutional methods to defend or promote their interests.

There are, of course, very few African countries—Lesotho, Swaziland, Somalia, Burundi, Rwanda, Botswana and Zimbabwe —where a single ethnic group constitutes more than 50 per cent of the total population. In this sense, most ethnic groups in Africa are minorities in the geopolitics of the countries where they are

located. But this does not eliminate the problems of inequality in the distribution of power, as political parties that have emerged in Africa's democratizing polities have tended to be ethno-regionalist in character. The formation of grand coalitions for governance is a rather rare or, indeed, non-existent, phenomenon. There is thus always a set of parties from some regions or ethnic groups that may feel under-represented in the highest institutions of power. Outcomes perceived as inequitable in terms of political representation have affected social cohesion and threatened stability in the public domain in a number of countries. Reforms in the governance realm focus, therefore, on the issue of executive and legislative plurality, power-sharing mechanisms and decentralization.

Plurality in legislative and executive power

Constitutional reforms, such as those which stress the rule of law, the delinking of ruling parties from organized interest groups, and the organization of competitive elections, have contributed to a new ethos of plurality in the governance of the public realm. The adoption of electoral rules that are oriented toward proportional representation has also helped to buttress plurality. In a study of 39 countries that had conducted multiparty elections by December 1997, it was found that even though the majority (21) still opted for the three electoral systems oriented toward majoritarianism (first-past-the-post, block vote and two-round system), the list proportional system, which facilitates plurality, is now not only well established, but is the single most common electoral system on the continent (Bangura, 1998; IIDEA, 1997). There is thus recognition in the democratic reforms to promote plurality.

There are two ways of measuring plurality in the legislative organ of government. The first is to count the number of parties that are represented in parliament; and the second is to count the proportion of seats controlled by parties other than the leading party. The first can be called *absolute plurality*, and the second, *intensity of plurality*. The second is a much more accurate measure of plurality than the first. In the African case, plurality is much less pronounced for the intensity measure than for the absolute one. The average number of political parties in parliaments, which is about 6.4, compares favourably with the global average of about 8.5 (excluding the Middle East) in 1997. However, the intensity of plurality, or the percentage share of seats held by parties other than the largest party, is still very low at 34.8 per cent, when compared with the global average of 50.9 per cent (excluding Middle East). Indeed, Western democracies, Latin America and Eastern Europe score over 55 per cent in the intensity of plurality measure, with Western democracies scoring the highest—about 60 per cent. Only Africa, and East and South Asia, have scores of less than 50 per cent (Bangura, 1998).

What this means is that single parties are still hegemonic in a large number of African countries, despite the opening of the political system to other groups. Only eight countries have an intensity of plurality score of more than 50 per cent. Nine countries have scores of less than 20 per cent, with Lesotho even scoring zero before the elections in late 1998 that sparked widespread violence, army mutiny and intervention by South Africa. In the 1990 elections in Lesotho, although the leading party scored only 54 per cent of the votes, it ended up winning all the seats. There was a similar situation in 1998: the opposition won only one out of the 80 contested seats despite scoring about 40 per cent of the popular vote. The distortions in the election results may be due largely to Lesotho's first-past-the-post electoral system. Reforms may have to focus on this area of political inequality in

13

addressing the issue of vote rigging and the opposition's under-representation in parliament.

Institutional reforms that encourage plurality have not firmly taken root in the executive organs of African governments. Most countries have opted for systems that elect a president through a majority of the national votes. Presidential elections in three electoral systems used in Africa—the two-round system, the list proportional representation system and the parallel system—require a second round to produce a winner with the majority of the votes. This is not a requirement for the first-past-the-post system, which can even produce a president with a minority of the popular votes in only one round of voting. This has been demonstrated in Kenya, where Daniel Arap Moi has failed to win the majority of the votes for the presidency in two elections in the 1990s (Torstensen et al., 1998).

It has been argued (Bangura, 1998) that the attempt to produce majoritarian outcomes in the presidential organs of government is a major limitation in the current efforts to introduce equity or distributional issues in the governance of African states. Except in cases where coalition governments have been formed to help with the passage of government bills in parliament, the pursuit of majoritarianism in the executive organ has given substantial powers to leading parties, which in several cases may not have enjoyed the confidence of the majority of voters as parties of first choice. Given the ethno-regional character of political parties, such outcomes may encourage polarization and instability in the political system. Ministerial, top-level parastatal and ambassadorial appointments—the core resources over which political groupings contend—may reflect the majoritarian outcomes of the second rounds of presidential elections. This has, indeed, been a major source of instability in many African countries. Majoritarianism in the executive system sustains the ideology and practice of winner-takes-all that has been the source of so much instability in much of the politics of the continent. Organized groups in civil society may have to factor into their advocacy programmes the issue of plurality in the executive arm of government, if the public space is to be rendered stable enough for effective civic practices.

Power sharing and political stability

The second trend in the redistribution and restructuring of public power in African states relates to the crafting of institutions that will allow for the sharing of the commanding heights of government. Power sharing is a function of plurality. Under power sharing, additional methods to electoral reforms may be utilized to ensure that leading parties do not monopolize power, however overwhelming their majorities may be. Through constitutional arrangements, peace agreements or political pacts, leading parties may be forced to share power with defeated or weaker opponents. In short, the first set of reforms on plurality tends to be *ad hoc*: even when plurality outcomes demand the formation of coalition governments, their composition may largely depend upon the discretion of leading parties. In other words, the latter may decide which members of opposition parties should be brought into the governing coalitions. Under power-sharing reforms, however, the offices to be shared, and the actors who are qualified to share them, may be decided in advance. Leading parties may have no discretionary or veto power to choose allies or coalition partners.

State reforms that are oriented toward power sharing have largely been pursued in war-torn or highly polarized and unstable societies, in which wars and conflicts have been inconclusive. As a governance mechanism, power sharing may take on

several dimensions. In situations of real stalemate, both governing and opposition parties may share a wide range of public institutions. These may include the executive branch of government, senior positions in parastatal and civil service bureaucracies, diplomatic posts, the military and other security organizations. In other cases, power sharing may be limited to the security field or to organizations that are concerned with the supervision of elections. In between these two types are a large number of schemes that focus on policies for the rotation of the presidency among contending groups or regions, special concessions to potential losers in legislative and executive organs, the formation of grand national coalitions for government, and the devolution of power to minority groups at lower levels of authority.

A key example of power sharing is the Lusaka Accord for peace and governance in Angola. This accord gave a number of cabinet seats, parastatal directorships, ambassadorial appointments and regional governorships to Jonas Savimbi's rebel UNITA movement, which lost the elections to the ruling MPLA government.[2] Mozambique, another war-torn country, also practices a modified form of power sharing, especially on issues dealing with national security. But unlike in Angola, the losing armed opposition, Dlakama's RENAMO, is not represented on the executive branch of government. However, it controls about 44.8 per cent of the seats in the national parliament and a good number of regional governments— although not the critical offices of the governors, which have been a bone of contention between RENAMO and FRELIMO.

The power-sharing reforms in the above cases were all facilitated by external powers. However, those of South Africa and Nigeria were basically homegrown. This was probably because of the relative capacities of the two governments to oversee their respective transitions—even though the Nigerian transition happened to have been deeply flawed when the power-sharing constitution was adopted. In South Africa, parties that scored 5 per cent of the votes were expected to be part of the national government. And in Nigeria, a rotational principle for sharing the presidency, which divided the country into six zones, was introduced as an effort to break the stalemate that had dogged that country's politics since the annulment of the elections of 12 June 1993.

Despite its increasing appeal in the resolution of conflicts, the management of power-sharing systems during periods of democratization and liberalization has been fraught with difficulties. One major problem has been the tendency for such arrangements to degenerate into *power-sharing oligarchies*, with civic groups beholden to organizations that have superior capacities in the field of war or can guarantee basic security—the primary *raison d'être* of many power-sharing systems. Thus, groups that were not part of original settlements may find it difficult to gain access to the peak governance institutions shared by the principal antagonists who negotiated the agreements (Adekanye, 1996; 1999).

In addition, those who share power under political arrangements that were borne out of war or polarized conflicts may not easily embrace civic values and democratic principles. Instead, they may continue to view political competition in zero-sum terms. Winners may seek to protect gains made early in the distribution of power, whereas losers may work toward overturning their disadvantages. Both

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[2] This agreement has collapsed because of the reluctance of Savimbi's UNITA movement to hand back to the central government the territories that it controls. These territories are very rich in diamonds.

strategies may be pursued outside of the legitimate rules of political bargaining. Where armed groups in power-sharing arrangements are in control of primary resources like gold, diamonds, drugs or timber, the costs of giving up such advantages for a stable—but uncertain—civil life may be perceived to be high. The breakdown of the power-sharing system of resource-rich Angola, for instance, underscores this point.

Decentralization and diffusion of power

The third trend in the reform of the state for equitable governance deals with decentralization. If plurality and power sharing seek to broaden participation in the governance of central institutions, decentralization is primarily about diffusing such power and allowing groups that are disadvantaged at the centre to exercise some measure of control or influence at lower levels of authority.

During colonial rule, although local authorities were given much power to maintain law and order, collect taxes, provide limited social services, and enforce customary laws and traditions, these took place within authoritarian systems, or what Mamdani has called *decentralized despotism.* The colonial governors retained ultimate powers in deciding the leadership and character of local traditional authorities; and the powers of the latter tended to assume autocratic forms, even though there were significant variations across countries. A two-tier system of law, public rights and administration separated cities from rural areas and, in some cases, groups within cities. Individual identities were linked to ethnically defined structures of customary practices, thus legitimizing ethnicity in the governance of both cities and rural areas (Mamdani, 1996). Of course, social practices in many African rural and urban settings remained very fluid, and hardly tallied with the colonially imposed agenda of ethnic-specific behaviour.

At independence, efforts were made by many countries to reform the colonial structures of administration and politics at central and local levels. The approaches to local-level reform varied considerably, with populist regimes, such as those in Guinea, Burkina Faso and Uganda opting for radical measures entailing the dissolution of the chieftaincy-based structures of power, and the creation of popular systems of rule. At bottom, however, outcomes tended to be remarkably similar: one-party regimes and military governments, whether conservative- or populist-led, retained much control over local affairs. In some countries—such as Sierra Leone—even the limited decentralized governments that were in place were abolished, and the provision of services transferred to central authorities (Abraham, 1993). The triumph of authoritarian rule in most countries further undermined efforts to create self-governing and self-provisioning local governments in most countries.

The crisis of the 1980s and programmes of economic stabilization exposed the weaknesses of the independence state and previous efforts at reforming it. Reduced central government revenues seriously affected local-level governance and service provisioning. The fiscal crisis and public expenditure controls affected not only the amount of revenue that was made available to local authorities, but also the manpower and quality of service provided by the central government. Incomes and employment were seriously depressed at both central and local areas. In some countries—former Zaire, for instance—the failure of central governments to honour their responsibilities led to high levels of *de facto* autonomy for local and regional authorities. Corruption, local clientelism and poor service became further entrenched.

The 1990s have thus witnessed renewed interest in decentralization. Decentralization is crucial to the institutional reforms recommended by the key lending agencies in their current programmes of reform of Africa's public sectors. Since decentralization is seen as a basic problem of management or public administration, donors have been less inhibited in intervening in this area than in democratization or other governance reforms, which are perceived to be much more political, unwieldy and unpredictable. Indeed, decentralization falls neatly into the neoliberal logic of divesting the central state of many of its responsibilities and encouraging the growth of market forces. But decentralization also constitutes a central pillar of the demands for the restructuring of the African state along more distributional lines. It has been used especially in countries that have been troubled by ethnic conflicts—such as Ethiopia, Nigeria, Uganda, Mali and Senegal—to disperse central political power.

Decentralization involves the creation or reactivation of local governments, the devolution of the powers of central ministries to regional and local areas, attempts to devolve fiscal or tax-raising powers in certain areas of governance, establishment of formulas for sharing centrally derived revenue between various levels of government, and—in some cases such as Ethiopia and Nigeria—constitutional federalism. However, in most cases, decentralization has not led to real transfer of power and autonomy to regions, municipalities and local rural authorities. This is the case even in the bold decentralization programme of Ethiopia, in which power has been devolved to ethnically defined regions within a federal structure and a constitutional principle has been upheld that respects the rights of nationalities to secede from the federation.

A strong centralization impulse has informed all decentralization programmes that have been attempted in the continent (Olowu, 1998). Governments are often more willing to decentralize line ministries, which they may still be able to control, than to devolve real tax-raising and law-making powers to regions and localities. There have also been concerns that real decentralization of authority may make it difficult to pursue effective macroeconomic stabilization policies. Sub-national governments may incur high local expenditures and debt and frustrate central government efforts to stabilize national price levels. Given the nature of patronage politics in many crisis societies, as well as their underdeveloped civil societies, financial markets and central banks, fiscal decentralization may increase pressures for higher budget deficits and debt-to-GDP ratios.

Fiscal and political decentralization may also undermine the growth of national markets and economies, and encourage sub-national units to engage in discriminatory practices and ethnic witch-hunts. It may lead to inequalities between regions and sub-units if it is not accompanied by effective institutions of intergovernmental fiscal transfers and social solidarity. If the inequalities are acute and the transfers are seen always to flow from a few wealthy regions or sub-national governments, taxpayers or citizens from those regions may question the costs of the transfers. In addition, in many African economies, which are dependent upon a few export commodities and where prospects for the generation of local revenue are slim, fiscal decentralization may accentuate the problems of revenue sharing between local or regional governments and central authorities. Local governments or regions where raw materials are located may call for greater access to national export revenues, and powers to raise additional local taxes on such commodities. The case of Nigeria's oil-producing states and their local governments is a classic example. This issue is central to the demands of the Ogoni

ethnic movement and its confrontational relations with the federal military government.

The main challenge for civil society in decentralization reforms is whether central states and sub-units are able to agree upon a minimum set of civic values that will uphold basic citizenship rights of residence, work and access to social services without reference to ethnic origins; and whether organizations at local levels are able to develop a civic culture that will complement the secular, non-discriminatory values that interest groups, associations and advocacy institutions seek to advance in national settings.

◆ The Crisis of Security: Reforming the Military Institution of the State

Policy makers, development agencies and advocacy groups increasingly support the view that efforts to reform the African state will have to include its coercive apparatus. In addition to its normal function of defending the state's territorial integrity, the military in independent Africa has also been an institution drawn directly into the realm of governance. Soldiers compete with politicians and pressure groups to influence and gain control of governance institutions. One upshot of the military's governance role has been the dramatic rise of the military budget relative to other crucial public expenditure needs, such as education, health, housing, food security and transportation.

The military's conquest of the state apparatus and the rise of national defence budgets have produced an exponential growth in the numbers of men and women under arms in Africa. Current estimates put the number of soldiers in sub-Saharan Africa at well over 800,000, at a cost of almost $8 billion (UNDP, 1996). The real figure may well be over one million if non-state armed rebel groups, which have proliferated in the 1990s, are included. Although the long-running economic crisis and structural adjustment programmes led to a decline in the total value of defence expenditure of about $2 billion between 1985 and 1994, the proportion of defence expenditure to GDP has increased—not decreased—from 2.1 per cent in 1985 to 2.9 per cent in 1994. Indeed, it is only in the African region that defence expenditures grew rather than declined relative to GDP during this period.

Patterns of civil-military relations

What have been the patterns of civil-military relations in Africa? They have varied considerably among countries. Hutchful and Bathily (1998) in The Military and Militarism in Africa provide interesting insights on the different configurations of civil-military relations during the independence period. In some countries, such as Ghana and Burkina Faso, where junior army officers usurped state power in the 1980s, the classical notions of the supremacy of civic power and the neutrality or apolitical role of the military were seriously questioned. In these countries, junior officers proclaimed the right of the military to participate in politics, and challenged the institutions of professionalism that were believed to have obstructed the political and economic aspirations of rank-and-file soldiers.

In other countries, such as Nigeria, the goal has been to consolidate professional hierarchies and insulate the military institution itself from the dynamics of partisan politics, which has been heavily polarized along ethno-regional lines. By adopting a strategy of "non-partisanship", the Nigerian military has tried to present itself as

18

the ultimate custodian of national unity, even though it suffers from the same ethnic fissures that have plagued the civic public since the 1960s. It is, indeed, amazing that despite having governed the state for 28 out of 39 years since independence, the military continues to draw a distinction between civic politics and military life. It could be argued that one of the main problems encountered by Sani Abacha (Nigerian president from 1993 to 1998) was his attempt to destroy this tradition of "non-partisanship" in military governance in his ill-fated self-succession plan.

Another variant of civil-military relations is offered by countries where the professional state army was defeated by armed guerrilla forces: Mozambique, Angola, Uganda and Ethiopia. In these cases, the guerrilla armies usurped the powers of the old armies and became tools of the party or movement that exercised power at the state level. Other countries, such as Tanzania, which experimented with popular forms of rule after armed mutinies by their post-colonial armies, pursued similar policies. Party structures were created in the military and high-ranking soldiers occupied important positions in the party and government.

Even in countries that have had a longer period of plural politics—Botswana and Senegal—the military is much more accountable to ruling parties than to the civic public. It is important to note that in all African countries, the state system, which includes the military apparatus, is not decoupled from government, and has often been controlled by a dominant party or the military itself. National armies in most cases are nothing more than extensions of ruling parties or "military politicians". They are one of the control mechanisms that governments have used to weaken the growth of civil society and promote authoritarian or obedient rule.

The democratization wave of the 1990s has raised serious questions about the role of the military in the emerging plural politics. The military is seen as an obstacle to the growth of civil society and democratic politics. Indeed, a large number of military rulers have been able to adjust their strategies of dominating the state system by embracing the prevailing wind of democratization. They have organized elections and manipulated the outcomes to their advantage (Niger, Togo, Burkina Faso, Gambia). Others have frustrated the work of national conferences that would have established neutral electoral bodies for free and fair competitive politics (former Zaire, Togo, Cameroon). And some have made a dramatic comeback by staging coups (Niger, Sierra Leone, Burundi, Guinea-Bissau). Despite democratization, there have been 15 military coups in Africa since 1990.

Indeed, there is one troubling statistic about the African state that scholars of civil society and democratization need to take into account: its high level of militarization measured in terms of the professional origins of leaders of state power. Twenty-one of Africa's current 47 leaders first came to power by staging a military coup d'état. An additional nine came to power through civil wars or armed struggles. This means that more than 60 per cent of current African leaders have strong links with the military. Add to this the increasing de-professionalization of the military, the rise of lumpen elements within its ranks (as seen in Sierra Leone and Liberia, for instance), and the dangers of military rule provoking new rounds of civil wars or rebellions (such as in Congo-Brazzaville, Central African Republic and Congo-Kinshasa), and it is evident that civil society itself may be endangered without a reform programme for the military apparatus of the state.

Downsizing for development and civic control

Two main reform programmes for the military can be identified that have implications for state-society relations. The first falls in the sphere of downsizing and the depoliticization of the military. Downsizing entails force reduction or demobilization, and leaner and cost-effective defence budgets. Programmes that deal with the creation of new national armies out of opposing combat groups— Mozambique and South Africa—also fall under this category: the size of the new armies is expected to be less than the combined strength of the respective original armies. The resettlement of ex-soldiers and combatants in civil society is often central to the policy of downsizing. This policy has produced mixed results. Like the rest of the reforms in the state system, it heavily depends upon donor funds for success. Where funds have been limited or slow to be disbursed, as in Liberia, armed combatants have mobilized street power to press claims.

As we have seen, there has been a reduction of the total value of public funds that are allocated to African armies. However, the fact that defence expenditure relative to GDP continues to rise for most countries (for 24 out of 41 countries with data) suggests that the military is still a powerful interest group in African politics. The continued relative rise of defence expenditure may be due partly to the fact that a large number of countries have been in war during the 1990s. Therefore, the depoliticization of the military has remained a heavily contested issue in many countries. Soldiers have continued to mutiny over pay, restructuring and conditions of service (in Congo-Brazzaville, Central African Republic, Guinea, Sierra Leone); or interfered in politics to defend corporate privileges, threatened colleagues or political causes in the wider public (in Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Niger).

What the reforms related to downsizing have failed to take into account is that depoliticization or professionalization needs a structure of incentives that may be higher than what obtains in the rest of the public service—more than average salaries; subsidies on basic commodities; health, education and housing support packages; opportunities for further training; and funds for arms acquisition to support the quest for corporate status-building among senior officers. These incentives surely have implications for the social distribution of the burden of structural adjustment and public sector reforms that many African countries are currently implementing. They raise the question of whether soldiers should be exempted from the austerity measures of ongoing fiscal reforms.

At any rate, in economies where wages have been seriously eroded, physical infrastructure battered and productivities in decline, it may be difficult to work out an incentive structure that will keep the African military out of the corridors of power. In resource-rich countries, such as Sierra Leone, Angola, Nigeria and Congo-Kinshasa, there is even a high temptation for the military to continue to intervene in politics and control the revenue base of such states. Low levels of political development, weak civil society capacity, and under-institutionalization of the rules of competition during democratization may produce instability and offer armies numerous opportunities to take over the state and protect or claim privileges. This may happen even in situations where the military has been humiliated and has committed to stay out of politics.

It is also doubtful whether alternative schemes could be worked out that would allow society and elected representatives to offer the military some legally controlled and transparently supervised concessions to natural resources in exchange for their abstention from politics. Some countries, such as Chile,

20

Cambodia and Colombia—have experimented with such schemes in various ways: copper concessions in Chile, timber in Cambodia and drugs in Colombia (even though it is not officially admitted). The problem with such incentives is that they may end up reinforcing the claims of the military on the state and society. Again, where political and civic institutions are weak or unstable—as many in Africa—the military may ask for more concessions and, ultimately, the state itself.

Civic responses: The blurring of the military-civil divide

The second set of reforms concerns the efforts of civil society to provide alternative defence systems, which challenge the monopoly over arms enjoyed by standing armies in Africa. The most interesting case in this type of reform comes from Sierra Leone, where groups in rural society organized civic defence forces to contain the security dangers posed by both the official army and a rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front. The indiscriminate and horrific violence of both the army and the rebels sought to destroy civic culture, as well as community and state institutions. Originally, the militia force was located in the south and east of the country—areas that were hardest hit by the war before the *coup d'état* of 25 May 1997. The force relied substantially on traditional methods and institutions of warfare (Muana, 1997). Indeed, the different components of the militia group were identified by their pre-colonial defence titles, such as *Kamajoi*, *Kapra*, *Donsa* and *Tamaboro*.

After the *coup d'état* against the elected government, the militia force was transformed into a national, though informal, defence system. It collaborated with the West African regional peacekeeping force (ECOMOG), mainly Nigerian troops, to wrest power from the coup makers and their rebel allies in February 1998. Since then, there have been intense debates within and outside Sierra Leone about the future direction of the country's defence system. The official standing army has been roundly criticized, including efforts by the restored government and ECOMOG to use some members of the discredited army in the new defence system. There have been strong calls for the dissolution of the army, and the formalization of the civic defence system in the various chiefdoms and districts of the country.

The official policy during the first few months of the restoration of the elected government was oriented toward a three-tier defence system. The first consisted of a programme to train a force of 5,000 professional soldiers, around 20 per cent drawn from members of the old force with a proven record of loyalty to the state. These would be chosen through rigorous screening methods and employed on fixed-term contracts. The second tier was the formalization of the civil defence force—to be administered on a district basis, and accountable to paramount chiefs or local authorities. This was to be a purely volunteer force that would complement the work of the professional army. The third, less well articulated, was the policy of national youth service that would include military training. This would be applicable to all secondary school leavers (Kabah, 1998). It is interesting to note that Eritrea's defence system also has a compulsory national youth service.

The Sierra Leone case represented an interesting initiative that challenged established notions of civil-military relations and the role of the military in the governance of the public domain. There were efforts to limit the powers of the military by subjecting it to civic and political controls. However, the evolving defence policy was influenced by contradictory pressures, which may explain its multi-layered structure and ultimate failure. There were pressures from civil

21

society, which was anti-military and largely oriented toward the development of a formal civic defence force. There were also pressures from the regional peacekeeping force, which extolled the virtues of a professional standing army, and was sensitive to the costs of training new soldiers for an entirely new force. And there were pressures from donor agencies, which were concerned about the dangers of the proliferation of arms in a country that has experienced four different types of military systems—the rebel Revolutionary United Front; the defeated Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces; the civic defence forces; and the peacekeeping force, ECOMOG.

There are several problems with the three-tier defence experiment: the issue of whether a poor, but resource-rich, country like Sierra Leone, with a history of political violence and weak institutions, can succeed in creating a professional army in an environment of economic adjustment and limited government revenue; the question of how to insulate such an army from the vicissitudes of politics in a democratically plural, but ethnically bipolar, polity; the potential problems of rivalry between the two or three military forces; the powers which chiefs rather than the public are likely to enjoy in the recruitment and use of the civic defence forces; and the potential dangers of using such forces in local politics and during national election campaigns, especially when the groundwork for democratic reform of local government has not been established, and when the government continues to appoint chiefs rather than allow the people to elect them.

Ultimately, the government was unable to manage the three-pronged defence strategy—largely because of its weak commitment to the concept and practice of civil defence and over-dependence on the regional intervention force. It was much more inclined toward the creation of a formal army than a people's defence system. The violent invasion of the capital by the rebels on 6 January 1999 forced the government to open talks with the rebels in Lome and to involve the latter in a controversial power-sharing agreement without a popular mandate. Despite these setbacks, it can be argued that the civil defence initiative represented an attempt by civil society to curtail the power of the military and subject it to civil and democratic control. It opened up a new dimension in the state-society debate: the need for civil society to be involved in the construction and operation of national and local defence systems. The old dichotomy between the state and civil society collapses under this model.

CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to highlight the wide-ranging public sector reforms that are under way in Africa. The reforms are meant to address crises of state capacity, governance and security. The reforms on capacity are basically market- and managerial-oriented, whereas those on governance and security relate to issues of political equity and participation. The three sets of reforms have different implications for civil society. Under the capacity reforms, some civil society groups—such as public sector unions that have been central to the promotion of constitutional democracy—have been disadvantaged. Even though these groups have challenged aspects of the reforms that relate to their livelihood, they have not developed sound technical knowledge about the policy reforms. Nor have they worked out alternative visions and strategies of how to improve state capacity in a competitive world economy that is essential to national development and the well-being of unions and their members.

In the field of governance, civil society groups have yet to pay sufficient attention to the issues of plurality and power sharing in the executive branch of government. These issues are central to the promotion of stability and trust in public life, as well as to widening and protecting the space that civil society groups so desperately need. Sustained engagement with policy makers at central and local levels in reforms dealing with decentralization is also weak. Civil society faces serious problems in the security field, where official African armies and informal rebel groups are dominant in many countries. Unless civil society groups also develop strategies that can democratize knowledge about, and civic participation in, military activities, armies and rebel groups will continue to threaten the growth of civil society in much of Africa.

State capacity, political stability and democratization require a deepening of equity and participation in the governance and security fields, and the application of social equity principles in market-based public management reforms. Civil society engages the state in complex, non-zero sum, ways in public sector reforms. Civic contestation is important. But it requires technical knowledge of the reforms, and concerted efforts to promote constitutionality and capacity in the state system.

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27

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