



THE CHANGING ROLE AND SPACE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN TANZANIA'S FLUID POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Globally, progressive civil society and their organizations have experienced different forms of restrictions for effective functioning and optimization of expected contribution in governance and development processes. Both in the developed and developing world, the phrase “shrinking civic space” has become a buzzword in academic and development discourses. The phrase is used to illustrate government repressive actions that constrain the ability of progressive civil society to organize and function autonomously. The shrinkage of civic space is more serious in areas where civil society engages in advocacy and watchdog activities as compared to those involved in direct basic service delivery. The trend of constrained civic space is widely understood to be mainly caused by autocratic governance and social conservatism. Consequently, the trend has and continues to compromise potential benefits embedded in the role of civil society in form of coerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. Therefore, this paper examines how progressive civil society in Tanzania builds resiliency in the context civic space changes and withstand challenges that constrain their ability to organize.

Keywords

Civil Society, Civic Space, Political Environment, Tanzania

1 Introduction

The role of civil society in governance and development processes within any modern society cannot be over-emphasized, apparently due to its potential contributions. Indeed, civil society has been instrumental in various sectors and sub-sectors including governance and democratization processes (Fulton & Wood, 2018; Makuwira, 2011; Arthur, 2010), management of refugee crises (Meyer & Simsa, 2018), service provision (Brass, 2021; Clayton, *et al.*, 2000), sanitation and solid waste management (Tukahirwa, *et al.*, 2013), and many more. While the role and contribution of civil society are widely appreciated (Clayton, *et al.*, 2010), the space they occupy in the course of aggregating their interests, organizing and implementing their programmes and activities has and continue to be constrained (Anheier, *et al.*, 2019; Civicus, 2018; Rutzen, 2015; Carothers, 2014). The rating of civic space according to Civicus (2020) indicates that countries with open space for civil society to organize and function autonomously are less than 10% of all 196 surveyed countries while the rest have their civic space narrowed, obstructed, repressed and/or completely closed. In Tanzania, developments within the civil society sector have and continue to experience some kind of systematic restrictions (Cheeseman, *et al.*, 2021; Paget, 2017; LHRC, 2015; APRM, 2009) that inturn hinder the effectiveness of the roles played and the autonomy in the occupied space. In this paper, we examine how progressive civil society builds resiliency in the context of civic space changes in Tanzania. We start with a recap of theoretical perspectives regarding the state-civil society interface, followed by its historical development in Tanzania in order to understand the context in which the relationship is situated. Thereafter, we analyze resilience mechanisms that enable civil society to withstand challenges that constrain their ability to organize and then conclude the discussions.

2 Methodology

Primary and secondary sources of data were consulted in the course generating inferences and knowledge shared in this paper. While primary data collection was through in-depth interviews, the collection of secondary data was through documentary review. The dual methods were necessary because,

as argued by Creswell (2009) it is of advantage in qualitative research to employ multiple sources of data in order to ensure that an account of the phenomenon under study is rich, robust, comprehensive and well developed. We employed a qualitative approach to generate viewpoints and analysis contained in this paper. Discussions of findings took into account the already existing rich information and conclusions of the previous studies conducted on the same topic. Indeed, reflective analysis was necessary because one has to be fairly acquainted with what exists in order to provide a sound evaluation of emerging issues (Patton, 2001).

Furthermore, the work benefited from a semi-structured interview schedule administered among key players in selected NGOs representing national, regional and grassroots organizations in Tanzania. The choice of the method was informed by the knowledge that this was a purely qualitative study aimed to explore the impression of the experienced CSOs regarding the nature of civic space in respect of their interaction with state institutions. Therefore, the sample size was limited to six (6) CSOs covering two regional-based organizations in Dodoma City, two grassroots organizations in Dodoma City, and two national organizations based in Dar es Salaam. However, fewer in number participated CSOs were able to generate meaningful responses based on their long-lasting experience in the civil society sector in Tanzania. Based on proximity reasons, Dodoma City was selected to represent other regions with a relatively spatially distributed number of CSOs compared to the business and cosmopolitan City of Dar es Salaam. Besides, Dar es Salaam City was selected due to reason that many national NGOs have their headquarters placed there including those that participated in this study. Given the small size of the sample, conclusions contained in this paper may not be generalizable to the voice of the whole population working in civil society organizations in Tanzania. However, through the deductive approach, this work benefited from multiple observers and analysts (analyst triangulation) to ensure that results presented in this paper are reliably summative of the civil society development in Tanzania.

3 Civil Society, Civic Space and the State

The theoretical conceptions and historical origin of civil society are traced from 17th-century western philosophical tradition (Hyden, 1997). Ideally, civil societies are regarded as separate variables from the market or the state and they refer to an arena of self-organization of citizens and established interests seeking voice and influence (Anheier, *et al.*, 2019). Although civil society is conceptualized as an area between individuals (or families) and the state (Blair, 1997), it is also made up of associational groupings of all sorts. It is, thus, constituted by collective actors in the civic arena outside the government structures and the business world (Buyse, 2018). The analysis of civil society activities in Tanzania is experienced through the role played by formal civil society organizations. For example, Lange, *et al.*, (2000) considers civil society as formal and registered civil society organizations whose activities are practically and better analyzed through the functions performed by those organizations. Indeed, civil society embraces all civil society institutions; hence, they are widely understood as a synonym for civil society organizations (Buyse, 2018:3). In this paper, therefore, civil society is approached through their organizations specifically those demonstrating progressive civic norms. The purpose is to allow the analysis of the roles and space they occupy in relation to the state.

A better understanding of civic space needs to take into account the legal, policy and administrative environment under which civil society-state interface is experienced. As Buyse (2018) aptly put it, civil society space or 'civic space' concerns the practical room for action and maneuver for citizens and civil society organizations. No wonder, contemporary discourses regarding the effectiveness of the role of civil society are largely predicated on the space they occupy. Essentially, discourses focus on the extent to which civil society does enjoy the freedoms of association, peaceful assembly and expression (Buyse, 2018). The analysis of civic space focuses on the political environment, such that the more state interferes with the autonomy and freedoms of civil society, the less effective they become in discharging their functions.

At the global scale, civil society has gained prominence due to proven and potential possibility for it to be able to shape political processes, organize political participation, and uncover corruption and human rights abuses in

addition to demanding accountability from state actors (EUP, 2017; Clayton, *et al.*, 2000). Despite the proven importance, civil society continues to seek for protection and freedom required for their effective functioning (Masterson, 2007). The global restrictive trend is reflected in Tanzania irrespective of an increase in the number of civil society organizations and specific activities in which they engage. As illustrated by Kwayu (2016), a review of national and international reports from 2010 to 2015 suggests having limited engagement of civil society and their influence on the priorities of government and state institutions. The reasons attached to the situation above points out institutional and structural challenges that continue to constrain civic space. Largely, an autonomous and active engagement of civil society requires an atmosphere that is free from restrictions and any other conditions that can directly or potentially limit civil society to articulate or voice their concerns (Civicus, 2020; Rutzen, 2015).

Discussions in this article are guided by a liberal theoretical framework, which considers the development of democratic polity as a function of political settings that determine how the institutional structure of civil society is situated. This is to say, the development of democratic society requires having in place an autonomous and active civil society, allowing them to operate under democratic principles, focus on furthering civic rights and liberties, and building democratic and pluralist society (Anheier, *et al.*, 2019; Edwards, 2004; Hyden, 2003; Diamond, 1994; Arato & Cohen, 1993). In that respect, different explicit and implicit theories exist and offer explanations as to what civil society is, their role, the space they occupy and how to strengthen them. Hyden (1997), for example, identifies four philosophical schools of thought that dominates the debate regarding the role and space of civil society.

First is Associational School, which reflects on the thinking of Alexis de Tocqueville whose emphasis focuses on the importance of autonomous and active associations. In this school, civil society refers to a realm of organized social life standing between individuals and political institutions. As they occupy such space, civil society assumes an instrumental role in strengthening democracy. In this regard, the functions of civil society include, but are not limited to, the following: containing the power of the state through public scrutiny, stimulating political participation by citizens, developing democratic norms i.e. tolerance and compromise, creating ways of

articulating, aggregating, and representing interests outside of political parties at the local level, mitigating conflict through cross-cutting or overlapping interests, recruiting and training political leaders, questioning and reforming existing democratic institutions and procedures, as well as, disseminating information (Diamond, 1994). The school is criticized for propagating the simplistic version of pluralism that it is based on shared interests while societies potentially bare multiple, overlapping and opposing interests among individuals (elite pluralism) and not suggest how to mitigate the impact of inequalities and reduce conflict over policy. However, the school underscores the fact that civil society plays an important role in forging bonds of solidarity through an extensive network of voluntary associations. It is this voluntary or un-coerced nature of civil society that build-up trust, social capital and solidarity towards the fulfilment of their objectives (Walzer, 1998; Putnam, 2000).

Second is the Regime School, this originates from the ideas of John Locke whose focus emphasizes the nature of the regime and how to make rules more democratic with an interest in the organization of state-society relations (Hyden, 1997). The school is concerned with the handling of governance processes through agreed principles to regulate governance processes and the mechanisms under which the public legitimize state sovereignty and roles. The school advocate for the intertwining the state and civil society in ways that permits effective articulation and aggregation of societal interests. The school believes that institutional arrangements need checks and balance to limit authoritarian tendencies, which are inherent within the state and their institutions, thus calling for a more formal system of collective decision-making by the three main actors in a global society: governments, civil society and the business sector. The criticism of this school is that, it offers limited clarity on the uses of the concept of civil society. Nevertheless, still contemporary governance processes have benefited from the crucial role played by civil society especially in democratic processes (Edwards, 2004).

Third is the Neo-Liberal School, which borrows Thomas Paine's perspective regarding the importance of structural reform in the public sector that allows strengthening of individual rights, liberties and property ownership (Hyden, 1997). The school believe that advancement of rights and liberties depends on guaranteed space of civil society to check the state

powers. The school, therefore, calls for active civil society engagement in order to facilitate great benefits of democracy. The school considers civil society as the driving force of the democratization process as experienced in the 1980s political uprising of Eastern and Central Europe and Latin America, where civil society acted as an agent of change during the transition from authoritarian rule to liberal democracy in the regions (Arato & Cohen, 1993). The major challenge of this school is that it considers civil society as a panacea for democratic deficits and service delivery failure in developing countries with the argument that during independence newly elected government created the conditions under which autonomous civil society did not flourish. However, the school seems to have ignored other factors such as economic crises, massive poverty, corruption and ever-growing external debts (Hyden and Bratton, 1992; Mamdani, 1996). While this may sound plausible, one may appeal to Naomi Chazan (1992:94) who points out that, "The emergence of civil society does not guarantee the development of democracy; however, it is highly unlikely that a viable democracy can survive without a civil society".

Fourth is Post-Marxist, the school borrows from ideas of Vladimir Lenin who in principle acknowledges the importance of civil society, but hypothesizes the seizure of state power without accepting pluralist arrangements (Hyden, 1997). For them, accepting the existence of groups with different interests within a society will account for difficulties to accommodate them. Therefore, even though it is no longer dominant, the state is still crucial to the development of the society as it concerned with addressing impacts of social structures (the "have" and the "have not") created by the dominant economy. The school is sceptical of the role and space of civil society in the ongoing economic and political reform processes whose influences represent only minor adjustments rather than radical changes, hence calling for total overhaul (economic structure, political action and ideology) to offset the imbalances (Cohen and Rogers, 1995; Gramsci, 1971). The post-Marxist school is challenged of ignoring possible state's coercive elements and exercise of direct domination over society, hence allowing the dominant class to use institutions of civil society to mobilize popular support in favour of the prevailing economic order. However, the school have managed to underscore the important role of the state in any political community.

4 Historical Development of Civil Society in Tanzania

The historical development of the civil society sector in Tanzania is traced from different historical epochs depending on what an individual author is intending to establish. Since this paper is about to reflect on the role and space of civil society in Tanzania today, still it is worth presenting the history that dates back to pre-colonial society in order to help to draw a wider picture of the sector in a way of taking note of major benchmarks of its experiences in different historical eras. Some literature (Mpangala, 1992; Fadakinte, 2015) have contended that there was no civil society during the pre-colonial era due to the reason that pre-colonial society had no dominant state that could interact with civil society as it is in the modern era. This holds more weight because the state of civil society today is analyzed in the framework of liberal democracy by looking at its interface with the state institutions (Seligman, 1992; Lewis, 2002). Ideally, this kind of opinion tends to locate the origin of civil society from the rise of capitalism and is habitually considered to have similar meaning with interest groups and pressure groups often applied largely in political systems of advanced industrial countries (Hyden, 1997). Nevertheless, the pre-colonial situation in Tanzania suggests that civil society was merged with the state and thus civic activities were not as visible and active as they are in the modern systems of governance. In this regard, it is convincing to concur with Kiondo & Mogella (2006) that loose societal groups based on their ethnic affiliations, which later on formed invariably the roots of modern civil society, characterized the pre-colonial era.

The advent of colonialism in the African continent and Tanzania (German colonialism from the 1880s to 1919 and later on British colonialism from 1919 to 1961) in particular marked another era of development of civil society whereby a very clear line could now be drawn between the state and the civil society (Mpangala, 1992). Advocates of the view consider this historical era as a more apparent ground for locating the emergence and existence of civil society in Tanzania. During this period, civil society was organized as formal organizations such as cooperative unions, peasantry unions, working and petty-bourgeois classes. Others were informal groupings such as the *beni* dance societies, which were popular from around 1890 to 1930, and they provided not only recreation but also mutual aid for their

members (Kiondo and Mogella, 2006). The state of civil society during the colonial era was characterized by limited role and space in the governance processes. Among others, one of the major reasons has been that, civil society was considered as breeding grounds of decolonization movements (Lange, *et al.* 2000), thus, the colonial rule did not favour their emergence and existence.

In 1961 when Tanzania gained its independence from British colonial rule, the role of civil society continued to be vital and still, they occupied the space in the governance processes. However, a few years later in the mid-1960s, civil society roles were framed to be played within state institutional structures (Kiondo & Mogella, 2006). In this regard, the space of civil society started to be minimal in favour of state-centric mechanisms of political, economic and social development. This era was pre-occupied by the national building project under the leadership of Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere and it stretched up to the mid-1980s (Lange, *et. al.*, 2000). In the second half of the 1980s, decade Tanzania experienced a new wave of democratization under the Structural Adjustment Policies as engineered by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) (Kiondo, 1995). The era was characterized by re-claiming the space of civil society following the inefficiencies within public institutions that lead to the failure of public provision. It also marked the comeback of civil society organizations playing a fundamental role around service delivery and advocacy activities in an attempt to show the alternative ways of public sector management (Kiondo, 1993).

The 1990s decade marked the new political era and witnessed rapid changes in the civil society sector following the introduction of the multiparty political system in 1992, which was rooted in the increasing liberalization process (Kossoff, 2000). This went hand in hand with the widening space and role of civil society organizations in governance processes involving varieties of organizations with different degrees of accountability to their members. These include Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) both national and international, faith-based organizations, co-operatives, trade unions, media and professional associations, community-based organizations, research and advocacy organizations, legal and human rights groups, as well as political parties (Kossoff, 2000; Lange, *et. al.*, 2000). Since then, governance processes have benefited from the vibrancy of the sector as the country experienced a

significant increase of civil society organizations¹ (Lange, *et. al.*, 2000) and their activities in various aspects including service delivery, advocacy, environmental protection, human rights promotion and protection, to mention but a few (Kiondo & Mogella, 2006). At all this time, civil society actors have continued to strengthen the sector in terms of its resource capacity (technical skills and finances) as well as proper engagement and deliverance of expected results. As Lange, *et. al.*, (2000) put it, the last two decades experienced mushrooming of civil society organizations, consolidation of those organizations and efforts to influence governance and development processes in the country.

From 2000 to 2010s, civil society occupied relatively regular space in the governance arena wherein regularly civil society organizations have been consulted in various processes such as policy and legislation making processes as well as social service delivery (Haapanen, 2007; Kwayu, 2016). The civil society organizations have been key actors in poverty reduction strategy with an obligation of building local capacity and empowering communities, participating in monitoring and evaluation at national and community level, mobilizing and enhancing community participation as well as advocating for accountability of its members and government to the people (URT, 2010). Furthermore, civil society organizations demonstrated vibrancy in the constitutional review process whereby apart from playing an advocacy role through awareness creation in the communities they also participated in the constitutional assembly through a selected representative (Edwin, 2016). The period from 2000 to 2010s has been characterized by the consolidation of civil society organizations while occupying regular space in the governance arena.

5 Legal and Institutional Frameworks

The 1977 Constitution of the United Republic of Tanzania (URT, 2000) provides for basic civil rights—including freedom of expression and person's freedom of association—essentially required for autonomous organizing and

¹During this decade, Tanzania experienced a sharp increase of number of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) from 224 in 1993 to 8499 in the year 2000.

functioning of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Nevertheless, the CSO sector in Tanzania suffers from a restrictive legal framework that has and continues to allow the government substantial power over CSOs. According to Section 20 (1) of the Non-Governmental Organizations Act, 2002 NGO registration can be cancelled if it defaults the terms and conditions in respect of which a certificate was issued (URT, 2002). For example, the de-registration of Tanzania National Women Council (BAWATA) on 30 June 1997 and banning of HakiElimu's activities in September 2005 exemplify the fact. There are, however, different interpretations of the terms and conditions for both CSOs and Government alike, which can help to explain the existence of unease in relationships between the two. Nevertheless, the enactment of the NGO Act (2002) established a legal basis for registered NGOs, which suggests a gradual shift in the government's approach to the legal existence of CSOs. Nevertheless, the government pledges promising collaboration with CSOs, as the policy statement by Tanzania National Policy on Non-Governmental Organizations states, "The Government recognizes the significant role and contributions of NGOs in society and considers them as important partners in the development process. It is, therefore, in the interest of the Government to create a conducive and enabling environment to ensure that NGOs potentials are fully utilized" (URT, 2001:7).

Recent developments in the state of civic space in Tanzania suggests that the government has adopted institutional repressive mechanisms that have narrowed freedoms of speech, of the press and assembly. For example, the enactment of the Cybercrime Act in 2015 and Media Service Act in 2016, as well as amendment of the Statistics Act in 2018 and the Political Party Act in 2019, have generally constrained access and publication of information and therefore affected the fulfilment of the constitutional right to information. Likewise, the amendment of the NGO Act in 2018 introduced more control mechanisms through additional functions of the registrar, narrowing the definition of NGOs, the time limit for NGO registration validity, and putting additional requirements in relation to the financial reporting of NGOs (URT, 2015; 2016; 2019). All the same, awareness continues to grow among CSOs and governmental authorities on the need to have in place a friendly institutional and legal environment for an autonomous space and functioning civil society and their organizations.

6 Resiliency Mechanisms, Issues and Challenges

This paper aimed to examine the thrust of civil society in Tanzania focusing on mechanisms adopted by civil society organizations to continue to play their role and occupy space in governance and development processes. The analysis of primary and secondary data suggests that civic space in Tanzania is shrinking due to constrained political environments. Indeed, that restrictive environment threatens the future visions of civil society in the country. In what follows, we identify and discuss different mechanisms adopted by civil society organizations in order to counter-balance the situation and be able to withstand those challenges.

6.1 *Maintaining Neutral Political Position*

Civil society organizations maintain neutrality in activities that concern political mobilization, campaigns and elections. This mechanism came as a response to an attempt of the government to suffocate civil society organizations through the politicization of their traditional activities. While the approach helps to make civil society organizations continue to function, it is equally true that their role is compromised. In fact, it is a quiet trick for civil society organizations to be able to recognize what is political and what is not in their daily functioning. They are constrained from demonstrating their value as facilitators, conveners and innovators. As argued by Mhina (1998), it is theoretically possible to distinguish political from non-political agenda, but it is not that easy in practical terms to distinguish them especially on issues of governance and service delivery. Therefore, be it on humanitarian work or delivery of services, civil society finds themselves arguing in a manner that government considers them as opposition political parties. During an interview with one leader of a national civil society organization indicated that they attempt their level best to distance themselves from political activities though not easy to achieve the same, as quoted saying;

Our activities require us to be innovative as service providers and advocates of civic rights and duties. In so doing, potentially we challenge policies and some specific decisions of the government and ruling party as well. Though this is not that easy, we try our level best

to remain neutral, not criticizing political parties openly [Interviewee, 11th November 2019, Dar es Salaam].

Reflectively, the legal establishment of civil society organizations in Tanzania regard them as non-partisan and they cannot engage in political activities. For this, government constrains some civil society organizations because of their engagement in political activities sometimes bearing an agenda of a particular political party in the opposition. Indeed, some active individuals in civil society organizations turn to be a contestant for elections in levels of members of parliament and ward councillors. This makes the government be suspicious of civil society organizations and re-direct reasons for the closure of civil society space to have originated from civil society organizations themselves. It can be argued that government take advantage of organizational weaknesses to silence targeted civil society organizations, as was the case for BAWATA which was de-registered in 1997 (Mallya, 2009) and HakiElimu was temporarily banned from operating in 2005 (Mongula, 2007). This is to say until civil society addresses its internal weaknesses and make them less connected with opposition political parties, then the blame for the politicization of their activities could not rest on government alone.

6.2 Focusing on Priority Concerns of Local Communities

Civil society organizations opted to focus more on the priority needs of local communities in order to build trust and legitimacy. One of the challenges encountered in the civil society sector in Tanzania is criticism related to not having a closer link to the people they serve. In due course, the government has come up with legislative control through the Miscellaneous Amendments (No. 3) Act, 2019. Previously, there was room for maneuver and flexibility as observed by Haapanen (2007) that some robust advocacy organizations—such as Haki Elimu, Policy Forum and Tanzania Gender Networking Programme (TGNP)—were registered under the company Act, making them survive threat for de-registration. It can be recalled that in 2005 government banned HakiElimu for what appeared to be too critical in their educational reform advocacy (Mongula, 2007). However, it could not be de-registered, but the government could have done it easily if the Haki Elimu had been registered

under the NGO Act (2002) which allows de-registration of civic organizations with impunity.

The government feels that civil society organizations can be more useful in complementing government efforts in service delivery than assuming the watchdog role (Mallya, 2009). This can be opined as an attempt by the government to tell civil society what they should engage in to avoid them from getting into trouble. Indeed, a good number of civil society organizations finds it wise to engage with people on the ground and do what is safe for them to do (Brass, 2021). Apparently, there have been diverse service provision options currently observable on the ground, which includes, but are not limited to, legal aid, care and support for the vulnerable groups, construction of social service infrastructures, health and educational support services, counselling services, credit and skills building for small business enterprises, as well as capacity building and training for community-based organisations (REPOA, 2007). These services have raised the confidence of local communities who benefits from the same as they consider civil society to be the most significant player in providing services to marginalized people.

The government on the other hand, similarly perceives civil society organizations as the most significant player in terms of providing services to the marginalized people, as compared to when they engage in advocacy activities. As a result, civil society organisations enjoy relative freedom as long as they leave the government alone and do not get involved in debates that appear to encroach on perceived sensitive spheres of the government. Essentially, the reasons for the shrinking of civil society space varies from one country to another. Elsewhere, civil society restrictions come with the notion that governments see them as a threat and decide to employ tactics to discredit and weaken them, thereby limiting the space in which they can work. In Russia, for example, the federal government has established a *'foreign agent'* law to control funding to civil society organizations in addition to labelling them as *'spies'*. In other countries such as Turkey and Azerbaijan, governments establish government-oriented civil society organizations in order to garner their support on policy-making while simultaneously discouraging independent civil society (EUP, 2017). This state of affairs can also be traced historically in Tanzania wherein during single-party political system, the only political party *Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM)* used to control public life through the centralization of power, which discouraged

independent citizens' organizations and associations (Hoffman, 2013). In this regard, the practice appears to be maintained even in the liberalized political system wherein only a few organizations, which focuses on service delivery, pro-government organizations and some international organizations are allowed to operate with significant autonomy.

6.3 Innovating New Ways of Showing their Contribution

Civil society thought to innovate new ways of showing their contribution in order to contain state-created stressful working atmosphere. In the opinion of civil society actors in Tanzania, the sector is operating under stressful pressure. The environment is linked to what civil society actors considered deliberate measures by state authorities to restrict the work of the civil society. Consequently, civil society actors appear to be the targets of defamation, threats and violence (LHRC, 2015). On one hand, the reasons for the situation above has been linked to what civil society actors named as *authoritarian tendencies* of the state towards civic organizations. This is to say, despite the potential role that is yet to be exploited by civil society organizations in Tanzania; the government seems to consider them as less citizen-centred. Previously the situation has been observed to be the case especially civic organizations engaged in advocacy activities that seek to hold government accountable (Mhina, 1998; Meena, 1997). On the other hand, limited recognition originates from organizational weaknesses in civil society organizations owing to limited capacities and the absence of clear alternative visions on the other hand (Kossoff, 2002). Even so, few grassroots organizations and national level organizations have continued to enjoy relatively good interface with local government authorities and central government respectively.

When traced historically, Mogella and Kiondo (2006) and Haapanen (2007) observes the same practice during the colonial era in Tanzania wherein traditional civic groups (emerged in the pre-colonial era) such as burial groups, conflict management groups, traditional cultural groups and the like, were discouraged and in most cases declared them uncivilized. Today, this suggests being a global trend in recent years (Human Rights Watch, 2017; EUP, 2017) in the sense that many governments across the globe have tended to adopt measures that are ever more repressive and policies to restrain civil

society activism and silence critical voices. The situation prompted international civil society organizations to label those measures as *shrinking or closing the space for civil society*. Indeed, when the space is closed civil society actors especially engaged in advocacy and watchdog activities face arbitrary restrictions, physical threats, judicial harassment, arrest and sometimes death. In turn, if the situation continues to tend to reduce the capacity of civil society to play its fundamental role as an alternative provider in governance and delivery of services.

6.4 Complying with Government Regulation and Control Mechanisms

Civil society certainly shows compliance in respect of the government regulation and control mechanisms in order to avoid a suspicious relationship with government institutions. During the interview, it was learnt that government institutions perceive civil society compliance to conditions set by foreign donors as being used to facilitate foreign interest than responding to the needs of local communities. It can be recalled that foreign development partners mostly see civil society organizations as active in directly meeting pressing social needs. Such an important role is demonstrated through not only service delivery and promotion of self-help initiatives but also in lobbying and advocacy in order to influence policy processes and issues (Ndumbaro & Mvungi, 2006). Largely, local civil society organizations perform their functions with financial and technical support from foreign development partners. Those partners include foreign governmental development agencies or international civil society organizations. For local civil society organizations to qualify for such support it takes a number of criteria in order to ensure that the provided support is not misplaced (Kiondo, 1999).

The importance of civil society in Tanzania is common knowledge and it is well substantiated through an increase of their number and respective activities that contribute to democratic, educational, economic and developmental roles played by civil society organizations (TANGO, 2002). Largely, their contribution is realized through financial and technical support from foreign donors. However, in the opinion of civil society actors, the government cannot easily accept explanations as to why civil society organizations create a stronger partnership with foreign donors and/or funders of their activities than they do with the government (Anheir, *et al.*,

2019). Therefore, civil society organizations need to comply with government regulations and control mechanisms in order to avoid government suspicions. Though it is not worth justifying government suspicions, it is also important for civil society to reassess the positioning of civil society organizations. While this strategy enables them to continue performing their role, it is thoughtful to re-consider their positioning. In some cases, civil society organizations are crowded in the same issues mainly covering urban than rural areas while competing among themselves (Nguyahambi, 2013). In this regard, local communities perceive civil society actors as elite groups and donor-focused which are disconnected from the realities of the people on the ground, hence making government suspicions plausible.

6.5 Negotiating their Space in Governance and Development Processes

Civil society organizations continue to negotiate their position in order to address the challenge of superficial consultation by government institutions. Despite the countless civil society interventions which have helped to influence various policy processes (Kossoff, 2000), civil society actors in Tanzania feel that state-civil society consultations are relatively superficial. In this regard, even when civil society organizations appear to be participating in some governance and development processes still it was considered to be more of legitimizing the processes than making it instrumental. As a result, civil society actors appear to perceive the level to which government consults the civil society sector as superficial and the processes relatively not friendly. Even though civic organizations engaged in activities related to the monitoring of public service delivery are invited to participate in Regional Consultative Committees (RCC) and District Consultative Committees (DCC), still this does not deny the fact that both local and central governments prefer to collaborate with civic organizations that complement government delivery rather than with watchdog organisations.

It was learnt from interview responses that, civil society actors put blames on the government for what in their opinion appears as state institutions being allergic to criticism. Civil society actors cited instances of fast-tracking some legislation processes that make them have limited contributions. Civil society actors were concerned with an increasing number of laws and bills, intended to regulate the activities of the civil society sector.

Although many civil society organizations are working for a better Tanzanian society (Kwayu, 2016), their legitimacy is highly politicized, whereby some are discredited on grounds of working on hidden agenda (Makuwira, 2011). To address this, civil society continues to negotiate their space in order to sustain their critical voice and broad-based participation in support of democratization of the governance agenda.

6.6 Strengthening Organizational and Coordination Capacities

Civil societies continue to strengthen their organizational capacities in order to improve internal coordination and functioning. Despite the enormous development potentials within the civil society sector in terms of capacity and experience widely observed during the last two decades (Lange, *et. al.*, 2000), the functioning of civil society is constrained by limited capacities and internal organizational challenges. Subsequently, the declining role and shrinkage of the space have been associated with those capacity challenges. Principally, the effectiveness and subsequent impact of civil society organizations depend more on capacities disposed to them that ensure guarantee to organizational identity, financial resources, as well as networking (Hyden, 1997). In this regard, it appears sensible to corroborate the opinion of civil society actors who feels that capacity and internal organizational challenges inhibit them to perform their duties acceptably. In the same vein, FCS (2008) observed the perceived lack of coherent and enforceable framework among civic organizations that could enhance democratic practices. Indeed, this calls for the need within the civil society sector to focus on long-term capacity strengthening taking advantage of important tools like information communications and technologies (ICTs).

Today, the world is embarking on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while the opportunities for supporting poverty reduction initiatives, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity for all are apparent within civil society, capacity limitations may hinder their contribution at the expense of looking for capacity support. No wonder, civil society finds itself in the quagmire of the restrictions from the government but still come up with no long-lasting solutions to those restrictions. As pointed by FCS (2008), with exception of few national-level organizations, in regional, district and lower levels some organizations are not well established including regional and

district NGO networks. Besides, they are largely staffed by people with limited skills and experiences, hence challenging their potentials for sustainability, as they are highly dependent on donors. Thus, there should be well-informed discourse within the civil society sector and dialogue with the government to have an active push for an enabling environment. It is on this basis that, civil society continues to strengthen its capacities in order to counteract observed challenges, which make the sector to be rather polarized and characterized with limited or poor coordination among and within civil society organizations. In the same vein, civil society organizations in Tanzania have to learn to work together, possibly, by creating a joint programme in order to ensure information and resource sharing for synergetic results. In the spirit of conventional wisdom, that “charity starts at home” it is surprising for example, that civil society cannot collaborate among themselves but still they complain of limited collaboration from government actors.

6.7 Diversifying Local Funding Sources

Civil society has opted to think of diversifying local funding sources in order to address the challenge of declining levels of international funding. While there is increasing government scrutiny over foreign funding, there is also a declining trend of international funding leaving a good number of civil society organizations with nothing to facilitate their activities. The reasons for the decline of funding levels appear to be due to the withdrawal of the traditionally favourable donors. As a result, civil society finds itself in stiff competition and less openness between and among themselves. Furthermore, FCS (2008) observes that civil society organizations consider available financial resources inadequate while entirely being characterized with donor dependence. In addition, the report points out further the presence of an evident challenge of corruption practices within civil society that discredit their legitimacy to demand government accountability. According to Haapanen (2007), an overall picture of the financing of civic organizations in Tanzania started with general budget support (GBS) by the government, which later on was perceived to reduce funding to projects implemented by those organizations. Besides, the arrangement was criticized for compromising ownership of the development agenda among civil society actors at the

expense of sole hands of the government contrary to participatory approaches advocated in the 1990s.

The civil society sector experienced a decline in support funding despite a more strengthened advocacy role as highlighted by the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008 and Busan Agreement in 2011. To curb the situation, some national organizations have considered various alternative funding sources such as income-generating activities, research and capacity development training. The Foundation for Civil Society has also continued to remain a funding and capacity-building organization set up by donors in 2002 focusing on advocacy-related activities among organizations working at regional and other lower levels. The decline of funding levels have also affected the expected role of the sector to the respective communities. Responding to the question that wanted to grasp the impression of local communities to the presence of the civil organization in the area they are working, one respondent was quoted saying:

“... Our image today is not the same as some six, seven or ten years ago. Now people in areas we work perceive us as groups of people who enjoy life on their expenses, but with no instrumental contribution to their social, economic and political problems” [Interviewee, 16th December 2019, Dodoma].

The Government of Tanzania² corroborates this opinion as had once pointed out regarding increasing resource need in the civil society organizations that do not match with the growth of the sector. In addition, lack of transparency in the execution of their responsibilities especially on financial management had also been mentioned by the government as one of the major challenges in the civil society organizations hence hampering enjoying continued support from local and international civil society actors. Due to that, there have been increasing negative impressions among stakeholders (communities, donors³

² Matatizo/Changamoto Zinazoikabili Sekta ya NGOs (literal: Problems/ Challenges Facing NGOs Sector) available on Tanzania National NGOs Coordination website (www.tnnc.go.tz), accessed on 6th February 2017, at 14:00hrs.

³ It is important to take note that donors have but not limited to the following preferences: (1) Support to limited number of organizations than spreading their resources across the sector

and government) regarding the potential of CSOs playing their traditional role. Without neglecting the importance of foreign funding, the declining support should not be considered as a negative impression rather a change of hypothesis in the global north wherein societies in the global south are no longer perceived only through the rhetoric of poverty and aid but conceived as dynamic environments with many opportunities in each sector. In this regard, optimism was observed among few civil society organizations who are determined and they continued to play their role with or without support from donors including the government. Indeed, despite the critique towards the professional non-governmental organizations, at their best, they have been able to challenge the political debate and bring forth the grievances of citizens through advocacy based on their close contacts to the localities.

6.8 Promoting Voluntarism in the Civil Society Sector

Civil society has opted to promote voluntarism in its activities in order to encounter its declining level. The state of civil society in Tanzania indicates experiencing a declining level of voluntarism to the extent that there are more paid activities today than voluntarism that has used to be. According to Manara (2009), voluntarism has cultural roots that can be traced far back from pre-colonial societies. While historically changes had been predicted in the nature and scope of voluntarism over time, today's experience indicates that voluntarism is increasingly changing from the conventional benevolence that focused on general will to a kind of voluntarism that hinges on returns. Responding to the question that wanted to get her opinion regarding the level of voluntarism in civil society activities, one NGO Director indicated that there is a serious problem in this regard and she said;

“..... I do not know, is it because of hardship in life or poverty! I am very concerned with the mindset of our people and the situation today is very worse. You cannot imagine some university students came to my organization for practical training, but in the end, they started

(2) Working with organizations with good track record (3) Impose their own programme objectives (4) Usually tied to pre-defined projects.

demanding compensation for the time they have worked. Now, if these people who came to learn in our organization demanded to be paid, what about an ordinary person who is jobless. My friend, this is the situation we are in today; there is no free lunch even in the civil society activities” [Interviewee, 18 December 2019, Dodoma].

This is seriously problematic in the midst of a declining trend of support from the donor community and other civil society actors. No wonder, beneficiaries of those organizations are of the opinion that, civic organizations are no longer supportive in articulating community concerns despite the available space for them to engage. This state of affairs corroborates the argument by Kiondo (1993) and Shivji (2004) that the coming on of civil society organizations in Tanzania served as a buffer zone in response to the impact of downsizing of government (retrenchment). This is to say, it was part of the implementation of SAP policies in the 1980s. Thus, individuals involved with civil society activities seems not to be driven by voluntarism in the civil society activities but rather a paid activity just like other engagement outside the civil society arena.

Nevertheless, it is equally imperative to appreciate that voluntarism is an important force of which through the conscience of society it offers innovative solutions that respond to new social problems and needs, hence facilitating societal changes. Indeed, voluntary activity is more significant and well appreciated today given the ever-increasing erosion of the welfare state. Though it appears that volunteerism is in decline, it is of advantage to consider it as changing character to develop and support well-thought structures (coordination and planning) of voluntary activity, which is sufficient to respond to civil society functioning in the future. This is necessary in order to ensure long-term commitment towards common endeavours through the benevolent role of civil society that requires voluntary activity.

6.9 Collaborating with Government Institutions

Civil society opts to collaborate with government institutions in order to avoid being displaced from their conventional space. Civil society actors in Tanzania perceive the potential displacement of civil society organizations in the

governance arena. In their opinion, displacement of civil society is an emerging phenomenon that characterizes the state of the civil society sector in Tanzania today. Interviewed individuals representing grassroots and national CSOs in Tanzania, pointed the potential risk of civil society organizations being displaced from their traditional role and space of playing watchdog role in favour of service delivery activities. Addressing the concern for the role and space of civil society organizations in Tanzania today, one of the respondents who work as a governance project officer in her organization was quoted saying:

“... In the first place, our voice as CSOs is diminishing and even when we shout, nobody is paying attention in the government. In my opinion, this is a gentle way to behave in the democratic system of governance. But, on the other hand, the government style of working is silencing civil society organizations as it is now becoming more responsive and accountable to public concerns than it used to be in the previous regimes. Therefore, I see nothing is there for CSOs to complain against the government, if we are not careful then we are becoming useless ...” [Interviewee, 13th November 2019, Dar es Salaam].

This is to say, their main agenda within civil society organizations, which has profiled them for a long time as watchdog organizations (Nyang'oro, 2006; Meena, 1997) receives some kind of attention from the Government. Even though, governance and political analyst have criticized the government for its tendency to limit freedom of expression, largely, the fifth government regime in Tanzania has demonstrated some level of accountability, transparency and responsiveness on addressing issues that troubled the citizens for a long time. Despite the mixed feelings among political analysts in Tanzania and elsewhere, the fifth regime government in Tanzania appears to be more responsive and accountable. This follows personal efforts by President John Pombe Joseph Magufuli former President John Pombe Joseph Magufuli and his successor President Samia Suluhu Hassan (from Chama cha Mapinduzi – CCM) who expressed zero tolerance on issues that have for a long time tarnished the image of government such as combating corruption, dealing with misuse of public resources and adherence to public leadership ethics, and others. However, it might be too early to conclude the performance

level of government as far as good governance standards are concerned. On the other hand, there is a growing level of appreciation among donor community and development partners towards the government of Tanzania, which envisages influencing the flow of development support resources to direction from the civil society sector to the government. Besides, this happens while changing approaches among development partners and donor community who seems to favour more the intervention approach than those of lobbying and advocacy (Anheier, *et al.*, 2019; Kelsall, 2001). The changing approaches come with the hardening of values in the global North that seems to hamper civil society action in development cooperation. Therefore, civil society organizations opt to collaborate with government institutions in order to continue occupying their traditional space.

6.10 Creating Public Awareness about Civil Society Sector

Civil society organizations have embarked on creating public awareness in order to address provide a better understanding regarding conceptual knowledge and the role of civil society. The conceptual understanding of the civil society in Tanzania appears to be narrow and limited. Consequently, government actors recognize more the formal and organized institutions at the expense of informal and un-organized groupings of citizens. Partly, this is so because institutional settings by the state institutions would wish to monitor and coordinate the functioning of civil society. However, this conception of the sector tends to limit wider contributions of the civil society, especially from informal and unorganized groupings. Nguyahambi (2013) argues that civil society should be defined as widely as possible to embrace informal and un-organized groupings. This gains necessity in the Tanzanian context where formal organizations are active and more concentrated in urban centres leaving the overwhelming rural population un-represented. According to Masterson (2007) civil society as a term remains an unclear and varied description of several parts, which never quite add up to a coherent whole. Instead, defining civil society is an uncomfortable exercise given that labelling necessarily involves imposing norms and boundaries from a particular, political stance. Speaking of the potential role of informal and unorganized civil society, one respondent from a national civil society organization was quoted saying;

“You see..., because of the vacuum created by CSOs to speak for the people, citizens in Mtwara decided to raise their voices in the way they thought it was appropriate. Unfortunately, they were misunderstood and because such movements have no clear leadership, then the government perceived it to be backed by political agenda and they used force to suppress the movement” [Interviewee, 13th November 2019, Dar es salaam].

The quotation above registers serious concern regarding the role and space of informal and un-organized civil society in Tanzania wherein citizens need to express their discontent either through formal or informal civic movements. The inference coming from this quotation is that often time social movements germinating from the general citizens are considered as political movements and they receive strong handedness from the government. Unfortunate, sometimes because of limited political agenda politicians (from both ruling party or opposition parties) tend to jump into the movement in favour of political popularity including an appeal for re-election. Reflectively, looking at a wide range of weaknesses established in the existing formal civil society organizations in the country, it might sound plausible to consider furthering community concerns through informal and unorganized civil society, which normally emerge on an issue-basis and dies when those issues are well addressed. This is to say, in addition to formal organizations and associations, other groupings, which operate outside the state arena (Nzomo, 2003), should also be considered as a civil society because they organize themselves towards addressing common concerns in their respective community. Indeed, these are more effective as people connect and organize spontaneously than the organized one, which more often faces the challenge of being donor-driven and elite centred.

7 Conclusion

Civil society organizations in Tanzania operates in constrained civic space which is influenced by a fluid political environment. In order to continue playing their role, civil society organizations have largely chosen to collaborate with state institutions because withdrawal is not a language required in this context. Though protest is a legitimate approach, civil society

organizations consider collaborating with the state as a mechanism to cultivate change of government mindset and hence open the space for them to continue showing their inherent value in governance and development processes. While shrinkage of civic space is widely linked to domestic repression from authoritarian governments, it is also imperative to consider the role of international forces. Discussions in this paper highlight the presence of diversity in civic space, which include also some kind of conservative groups and/or activists who actively seek to frustrate or eliminate progressive civic organizations. This is to say, though the trend is said to shrink for civic organizations, it is also expanding for those seeking active alignment with the government. It is, therefore, advised that civil society should continue to exploit available opportunities to influence those in power to develop an understanding of pluralism political culture. Given the growing global trend in respect of shrinking civic space (Anheier, *et al.*, 2019), civil society organizations in Tanzania may require the adoption of new approaches including those that are not in their comfort zones.

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