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POLITICS & INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Civil society and the consolidation of democracy in Ghana's fourth republic

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Abstract: This study set out to investigate activities of civil society organisations (CSOs) and how they have promoted democratic consolidation in Ghana. Specifically, it assessed the contributions of three independent policy think tanks, the Institute of Economic of Affairs (IEA), the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) and the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) to the deepening of Ghana's democracy. The study adopted a qualitative method and the author interviewed one hundred and sixty respondents on the key issues. The study found that CSOs in Ghana have promoted the integrity of Ghana's election by observing every stage of Ghana's electoral process. They have also advocated policy changes in some key governmental social and economic policies including the passage of the Disability and the Freedom to Information Acts. In particular, the IEA, CDD and IDEG have inculcated democratic values of civic participation, political engagement and tolerance in the population thereby promoting democratic citizenship. The study also found that CSOs faced challenges as far as funding is concerned and this affects the attraction and retention of experts. Moreover, this challenge hinders the implementation of some of their major programs. There is also the perception in Ghana that CSOs

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This paper is based on the author's research for the award of MPhil in Political Science (2014). The work examines how civil society organisations contribute to efforts at consolidating democracy in Ghana and relates to the extant literature on civil society, elections and democratic consolidation.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Given the current proliferation of civil society organisations (CSOs) and their varying activities in the world today, this paper sought to investigate activities of CSOs in Ghana and how they have promoted democratic consolidation in the country. The paper assesses the contributions of three independent policy think tanks, the Institute of Economic of Affairs (IEA), the Centre for Democratic Development (CDD) and the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) to deepening Ghana's democracy.

Notwithstanding the perception in Ghana that CSOs exist to pursue their parochial interests, the paper found that these CSOs have promoted the integrity of Ghana's election and also advocated policy changes over the years. They have facilitated inculcating democratic values of civic participation, political engagement and tolerance in the population thereby promoting democratic citizenship.

The paper notes that creating the enabling environment for CSOs' operations will further contribute meaningfully to democratic consolidation in Ghana.

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exist to pursue their parochial interests. It is noted in this article that, if CSOs are to contribute to democracy in Ghana, it may be necessary for their capacity to be strengthened in areas such as technical and human resources. In particular, this will enable them to improve their advocacy in policy issues that promote accountability and transparency.

Subjects: Law; Development Studies, Environment, Social Work, Urban Studies; Politics & International Relations; Social Sciences; Communication Studies; Development Studies; Humanities

Keywords: civil society organisations (CSOs); democracy; democratic consolidation; elections; Ghana

1. Background to the study

The question has often been asked "in what ways does civil society contribute to democratic consolidation"? What kind of relationship exist between CSOs and attempts at consolidation in relatively new democracies? These questions have resonance in Ghana and in the world over since people associate civil society with voluntary self-government. However, when we move beyond evocative abstractions, we may find these and other related questions difficult to answer. The reasons are in most cases not hard to see, but under some circumstances difficult to substantiate since the concepts of civil society and democracy are differently perceived by different people across the globe.

Commenting on democracy, Robert Dahl indicates that the historically unprecedented global expansion in the acceptability of democratic ideas might not be altogether welcome to an advocate of democracy (1989). According to him, a term that means anything means nothing and this has become the fate of "democracy", "which nowadays is not so much a term of restricted and specific meaning as a vague endorsement of a popular idea" (Dahl, 1989, p. 2). Thus, what may be termed as democratic in one society may only be derided in another. Thus, Dahl concludes that, the word "democracy" has lost whatever specific content it might have had, becoming more a term of approval or endorsement of nothing very specific, much like the modern use of the word "nice", though the weight of approval in the case of "democracy" is appreciably greater (AfriMAP, 2007; Hyland, 1995).

Similarly, even the concept of democratic consolidation sounds so ambiguous and vague to laymen and even some scholars (Warren, 1999). What constitutes a democracy and how do we even know if a democracy is consolidated? These are some of the few questions that are usually generated whenever the issue of democratic consolidation is mentioned in relation to CSOs. Interestingly, some have even questioned the relevance of CSOs and civil society as a whole (Warren, 1999). Consequently, though most people assert the significance of CSOs in the democratization process, there are others who see nothing good about the "so-called" CSOs as far as democracy and its consolidation, especially, in the developing world is concerned (Bernhard, Tzelgov, Jung, Coppedge, & Lindberg, 2015). In other words, the normative expectations leveled at civil society are many, varied, and laden with incompatible ideological agendas (Warren, 1999).

This paper examines the role and extent to which CSOs impact on the democratic consolidation efforts in Ghana. It therefore looks at the evolution and development of the concepts of civil society and CSOs over the years and situates it in the Ghanaian context. It also examines how some key CSOs that work as independent research institutes in the country, such as CDD-Ghana, IEA and IDEG, have impacted the country's consolidation process over the years under the fourth republic. It also examines the democratization process in relation to various elections and other related issues since the inception of the fourth republic.

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2. The research problem

There are various perceptions regarding the existence, activities and operations of CSOs throughout Ghana in recent times. Mention is often made of CSOs in political, economic, and social discourse. CSOs have been associated with good governance, formidable economic policies as well as relevant social intervention programs (Bratton, 1994; Mercer & Green, 2013). These notwithstanding, a lot of questions have been raised with respect to their existence and activities (Mercer & Green, 2013). The central question that this paper therefore seeks to address is: "to what extent have CSOs aided democratic consolidation in Ghana?"

Just after the 2012 general elections, there were unproven claims and rumors of massive rigging in some constituencies in the Ashanti and Volta regions, which are the strongholds of the New Patriotic Party (NPP) and National Democratic Congress (NDC) respectively. The situation was not different from what existed in the national capital as well as the three northern regions. The issue of "unverified voters", "bloated voter register" and perceived "irregularities" by the Electoral Commission (EC) in conjunction with the ruling government were all issues of major concern to all Ghanaians and friends of the beacon of Africa's democracy. These claims have eventually been investigated and officially recorded through the investigations and ruling of the country's Supreme Court on the 2012 Election Petition. The question thus remains as to what CSOs did in bringing Ghana thus far (the fact that democracy seems to be "the only game in town"-behaviorally, attitudinally, and constitutionally). Did CSOs have a hand in ensuring that Ghanaians have peaceful free and fair elections? Did the activities and programmes of CSOs such as the IEA Presidential Debate, IDEG's Kumasi Declaration and CDD's voters' education and citizen awareness have any impact on the outcome of the 2012 general elections? And have their previous activities over the years since the inception of the fourth republic in 1993 done any good to democratic consolidation in Ghana? This paper is an attempt at trying to find answers to some of these questions.

3. Significance of the study

Some scholars and social commentators as well as the general population in Ghana and elsewhere have argued that most CSOs exist to pursue their own parochial interests. Thus, to borrow the words of John Locke, the chief end [of civil society] is the preservation of private property (Morley, 1884). To this group of people, CSOs are nothing more than a conglomeration of self-serving interested individuals parading themselves with the clothes of civil and societal interests. Eventually, it is argued that since they exist to pursue their own interests, their activities do not necessarily contribute in any meaningful way to the consolidation agenda of democracy. Hence, even when they do, it is just a "bye-product" or an "off-shoot" or better still, the "spillover effect" of their original motives. Such claims, in the researcher's candid view, are quite difficult to substantiate at any given point in time and highly contestable. This notwithstanding, it is also inappropriate, and highly unethical to dismiss such uninvestigated allegations and claims. Thus, in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, one cannot dismiss such claims, hence the need for appropriate investigations to dismiss or accept such allegations.

Indeed the idea that civil society is "not free from the logic of how power and politics operate in developing countries" and the fact that they "often find it very hard to find room for manoeuvre for their projects within the broader politics of patronage, ethnicity and exclusion" (Hickey & King, 2016, p. 16) does not take away the role that they may also play in the democratic consolidation process.

It is therefore imperative in light of the above elaborated reasons that studies be conducted in an attempt to finding out how the activities of CSOs in Ghana impact on the country's efforts at consolidating her democracy. The paper places emphasis on certain relevant and appropriate institutional activities and programmes in their respective and proper context on how such activities have aided in strengthening Ghana's democratic credentials which puts the country on the western coast of the continent as one of the few *Islands of democracy in the ocean of dictatorships, predatory and prebendal governments.*

4. Operational definition of concepts

4.1. Civil society organizations (CSOs)

In this paper, CSOs refer to a group or entity that is neither in the state or private sector but is engaged in a public activity aimed at advancing the interests or values of its members and or society at large. CSOs are therefore described as intermediary organisations mediating between the citizens and the state.

The paper consequently examines three independent think tanks that directly foster democracy and promote democratic consolidation in Ghana. Thus, the definition of CSOs in this paper includes in civil society only those voluntary associations that are based on norms of liberalism-individualism, formally organized, separate from the state, internally democratic and seek to influence government policy and achieve policy changes. Thus the three selected CSOs, namely IEA, CDD, and IDEG are seen to be independent of the government of Ghana and are internally democratic. Moreover, they seek to promote liberalism while also seeking to influence government policies.

4.2. Democracy

Democracy in this study means rule by the people as contrasted with rule by a person or group. It is a system of government in which everyone who belongs to the political organization that makes decisions, is actually or potentially involved (Ramaswamy, 2007). Thus, democracy here refers to the majority rule-cum-minority rights. Democracy here must also be seen as a system of government under which the people exercise the governing power either directly or through elected representatives. Thus, there must be "the supremacy of the popular will on basic questions of social direction and policy" (Appadorai, 2004, p. 137). Democracy in this regard consequently demands from the citizenry a certain level of ability and character that enhances active participation in the governance process and also rational conduct in public affairs.

4.2.1. Democratic consolidation

By democratic consolidation, the author is in this study referring to the "stability and persistence of democracy" and democratic principles. Thus, the author sides with Diamond (1999) when he argues that:

> Consolidation is most usefully construed as the process of achieving broad and deep
> legitimation, such that all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass levels,
> believe that the democratic regime is the most right and appropriate for the society, better
> than any other realistic alternative they can imagine. (p. 65)

In sum, democracy must become "the only game in town" behaviorally, attitudinally, and constitutionally as posited by Linz and Stepan (1996). Behaviorally because no significant actors would attempt to use non-democratic means to obtain a political power; attitudinally because democratic procedures and institutions are considered by the vast majority to be the preferred way of organizing politics; and constitutionally because all actors are subject to the laws and institutions of the democratic process. This is what Rustow (1970) refers to as habituation, thus democracy becomes ingrained into the fabric of the social organization. Eventually, there is a growth in trust and cooperation among political competitors, and a socialization of the general population.

Indeed the political actors in the consolidation process at any point in time cannot be just the individuals, either at the elite or the mass levels. A host of actors are relevant to the entire process and key among them are CSOs.

It is important to reiterate the fact that consolidation requires more than a commitment to democracy in the abstract as indicated by some scholars. To this end, Diamond (1999) has asserted that for a democracy to be consolidated, elites, organisations, and the mass public must all believe

that the political system they actually have in their country is worth defending. In other words, democracy can be consolidated only when no significant collective actors challenge the legitimacy of democratic institutions or regularly violate its constitutional norms, procedures and laws.

Democracy should be seen as a progressive phenomenon. Thus, democratic institutions can be improved and deepened or may need to be further consolidated. The implication therefore is that political competition can be made fairer and more open; participation can become more inclusive and vigorous; citizen's knowledge, resources, and competence can grow; elected (and appointed) officials can be made more responsive and accountable; civil liberties can be better protected; and the rule of law can become more efficient and secure (Dahl, 1992). Political institutions of democracy must therefore be more coherent, capable, and autonomous, so that all major political players are willing to commit to and be bound by their rules and norms. Improved protections for civil liberties and minority rights are also an essential condition for consolidating democracy and such activities are usually promoted through the programmes of CSOs.

5. Methodology

The overarching goal of the study was to examine the role that CSOs play in consolidating democracy in Ghana. This goal was motivated by the perception of ineffectiveness and underperformance on the part of CSOs in the country in relation to the country's efforts at consolidating her democracy.

The attempt to examine the role CSOs play in consolidating democracy directed the researcher to situate the study in the qualitative research design. The reason is that the qualitative design is deemed appropriate for descriptive and explanatory studies (Babbie, 2004; Yin, 1984). It consequently enabled the researcher to obtain relevant data in non-numerical form which also generated rich, in-depth insight into the research questions. Again, the choice of the qualitative design was informed by the need to explore the perspectives, thoughts and perceptions of some relevant stakeholders such as specialist in the area of CSOs and democracy, political elites, electorates, and the Electoral Commission (EC).

In order to enhance in-depth explanation of the contextual dynamics of the activities of CSOs in Ghana, the study adopted the case study design since it enhances empirical inquiries that investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin, 1984). The leverage in using the case study design is that it enabled the researcher to closely examine data within its real-life, natural context in order to obtain detailed understanding of the issues under study (Crowe et al., 2011).

The paper uses both primary and secondary sources of information. The paper interviewed officials of the three selected CSOs and an official from the EC headquarters. Moreover, representatives of the six main political parties that participated in the 2012 general elections (NDC, NPP, CPP, PPP, PNC, and GCPP) were interviewed. The secondary sources of information in this study included the use of the internet, journal articles, policy documents, etc. The dailies, press releases, official reports, etc. were also used.

The researcher used the purposive sampling (PS) for the selection of interviewees. The use of the PS technique to select interviewees is underpinned by the belief that some subjects are more suitable for the research compared to others. Thus, the interviewees selected for the study are not by accident or mere coincidence. Instead, they were selected purposely for the relative knowledge they possess concerning the issue being studied as well as been official representatives of major stakeholders in the Ghanaian society. Thus the wealth of knowledge and expertise they have was very useful to the study and this justifies the researcher's choice of such individuals and technique. Whereas officials from the selected CSOs speak from the practitioners' perspective, the political

party representatives give the view of the political elites in the society as well as that of the parties they represent. Similarly, the EC official also throws more light on some key issues from their angle.

The paper adopts a content analysis approach in analyzing the data since the technique is useful for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use and is also learnable and divorceable from the personal authority of the researcher (Krippendorff, 2004). Consequently, the paper analysis relevant responses by generating various themes from the data gathered; especially through the interview to explain them in their right context.

6. Ghana: CSOs and democratization (the history of a rough-start on a right-path)

It has been argued over the years that the construction of civil society in Ghana is the outcome of a process in which donor agencies, international NGOs, the government and social organizations all actively engaged in the discourse and used the idea to legitimize their actions. Thus in Ghana, civil society is both informed by theory and by its own logic based on historical processes (Whitfield, 2002). Moreover for African governments, including Ghana, civil society is a response to increasingly articulate demands from sections of society for greater representation and participation in decision-making and policy formulation. Eventually, in Ghana, government officials appear to believe that "consulting civil society" will lead to less opposition to government policies.

It has been said that Ghana's democratization process actually started on a very shaky note (as a result of the boycott of the parliamentary election in December 1992 by the major contending opposition parties) (Boafo-Arthur, 2006). This notwithstanding, there seems to be evidence to ascertain that the country is on a good path towards consolidating its democracy.

CSOs over the years have played vital role in the democratization process in Ghana. Even in colonial times, groups such as the Fante Confederation (1871) and the Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS/1890) fought and advocated for the rights of the indigenes. This continued throughout the independence and early post-independence struggles against undemocratic political regimes and military rule. For instance, from around 1975 onwards, demands for a return to democratic civilian rule grew, especially from the educated middle class such as the Ghana Bar Association and the Ghana Medical Association (Gyimah-Boadi, 1996; Wiseman, 1990). These groups together with various student bodies organized a series of nationwide strikes and demonstrations- all in the name of democratisation. However, negative official attitudes in Ghana in the early 1990s inhibited the growth of civil society in the country. The NDC government under J.J. Rawlings was openly hostile to organizations not under its control, especially if they are not apolitical (Gyimah-Boadi, 1997). The government accordingly was happy to invite international election observers, but objected vehemently to the presence of domestic observers in the 1996 elections and its agents attempted to compromise the domestic observer groups, especially Network of Domestic Election Observers (NEDEO). They vehemently opposed the EC's decision to grant accreditation to domestic observer groups, and made outrageous demands that NEDEO change its name and drop key members (such as the Christian Council, the Catholic Secretariat, and GNAT) deemed to oppose the government. The entire domestic observation process was threatened when the government publicly contemplated forming an alternative network of domestic election observers out of NDC-aligned groups unless NEDEO agreed to bring such groups under its umbrella (Gyimah-Boadi, 1997).

In concluding his article, Gyimah-Boadi (1997) argues that for the democratic progress to continue, Ghana needed stronger opposition parties, a more securely independent press, and a more vibrant civil society, as well as constitutional bodies that can restrain undemocratic governmental impulses. This was found to be true as time has eventually proven, and in light of which this particular study sought to examine how CSOs in Ghana have contributed to the country's democratic consolidation.

The handing over of power on 7 January 2001 from one administration to another on the basis of successful elections has been described as an "epochal day for Ghana". That day brought Ghana significantly closer to completing the process of transition to democratic rule that it had begun in the early 1990s, and thus marked a real step toward democratic consolidation (Gyimah-Boadi, 2001). Gyimah-Boadi opines that "the 2000 elections confirmed that civil society has really arrived as a key actor in Ghanaian democratic development, as it played a far more active and dynamic role than it had 1996" (2001, p. 110).

7. The specific role of CSOs in the consolidation process

As hinted earlier, in practice, civil society does not generally perform well in the early stages of democratic consolidation and the reasons can be found in the dynamics of the democratization process, notably in the deflation of political energies that occurs immediately after transition. Thus, the new regime may draw civic leaders into leadership positions in government or party institutions, thereby effectively co-opting and silencing them. In sum, the revival of political society and the conclusion of a political transition can have demobilizing consequences for civil society (Bratton, 1994). Consequently, as instruments of political consent, the institutions of civil society can either provide political legitimacy to governments, or withhold it. Invariably, studies have indicated that the specific political relationships of CSOs undoubtedly lead organisations to act, and exert influence, in very different ways. Thus whether responding to the agenda of others or creating their own impetus for action, having an instrumental or expressive focus, or acting on the margins or in the mainstream, the significance of CSOs is often bound up with the specific activities they undertake at any given time (Pollard & Court, 2005).

Several theorists have therefore attempted to explain the influence of CSOs in terms of the roles they take up and the tactics they employ. Some scholars such as Najam (2000), identify five roles which CSOs can take up and these are defined by their activities as monitoring, advocacy, innovation, provision of services, and capacity building.

CSOs therefore play a critical role in fostering individual's and community's knowledge, which can eventually lead to incremental policy changes or create policy windows. Thus, whether they instigate opportunities directly, respond to them, or simply lay their foundations, to create policy windows, CSOs must be adept at understanding and negotiating the contexts in which they work. Therefore in the long term, the role that many CSOs play in education may develop a well-informed community, with the capacity to pinpoint and articulate development problems in the future (Pollard & Court, 2005). Moreover, CSOs are also more proactive in creating policy opportunities and ensuring orderliness in society through various means.

In addition, CSOs can be key agents in coining or popularizing a particular vocabulary within policy debates. This is very important since shaping terminology is often more than just wordplay. In other words, it can be critical to ensuring which ideas and interests are noted and which are not (Pollard & Court, 2005). By so doing, it draws the attention of all stakeholders and political actors to the main issues that confront the populace and which when carefully addressed would foster peaceful coexistence, harmony, and eventually democratic consolidation.

Some CSOs work as mediators, influencing the formulation of policy by influencing the process in which it is formed. They therefore directly influence the implementation of policy by being the primary agents responsible for instituting policy shift and making it a reality on the ground. CSOs can also provide valuable expertise to other agencies responsible for implementing policies.

8. Findings of the study

The discussion in this section is based on the primary data collected from interviews and focus group discussions as well as responses generated through a structured questionnaire. The themes for discussion include the capacity of the three CSOs to undertake activities that influence democratic consolidation in Ghana as well as challenges that confronts them. The section also discusses the

major roles that these CSOs play under five thematic areas namely *Monitoring, Advocacy, Peacebuilding, Civic Engagement,* and *Capacity Building.*

9. The capacity and challenges of CSOs in influencing democratic consolidation in Ghana

The study shows that the three CSOs have a capacity that enables them to undertake certain programs that other CSOs in the country are unable to do comparatively. Thus, the existence of experts and specialized persons located within IEA, CDD, and IDEG are a key part of their seemingly success story. This is also possible as these organisations are sponsored by some development partners including the UNDP, USAID, NIMD, STAR-Ghana, etc. Virtually all the CSOs under consideration are funded by these development partners and donor agencies through what is usually described as "project funds" and mostly 15% of such funds are allocated to overhead or administrative expenses (Interview, 2014). The financial independence from governments empowers CSOs to be positively critical of government policy issues and provide alternative views based on research and analysis (AfriMAP, 2007).

The credibility that these three CSOs have built over the last decades have earned them the trust of most political elites and parties though sometimes there are a few issues of misrepresentation and perceptions of being biased on the part of some CSOs. Thus, some political elite argued that most of the CSOs are ideologically based. According to such individuals the CSOs are not doing things out of goodwill because they are funded by some specific agencies which lean towards certain ideological positions. It is thus asserted that some of the CSOs are "actually promoting ideological positions". It is consequently said of IEA that some of its programs, including the debates, are all ideologically motivated. One interviewee pointed out that some of the programs that IEA consistently holds "seeks to promote certain capitalists agenda" and that "they cannot be seen wholly as a neutral body simply helping to promote politics and democracy in Ghana" (Interview, 2014). It is also said that some of the CSOs are biased and even "surrogates" and that they sometimes keep quiet over issues that require their condemnation, hence they are doing the nation a disservice. This notwithstanding, the interviews reveal that majority of the political elites have a positive view of the CSOs.

Though all the three CSOs agreed that they have development partners that support them and their projects, they also raised the issue of funding as a major challenge to most of their programs. The problem of funding sustainability eventually impacts on the attraction and retention of specialized staff by these CSOs.

The widespread belief that CSOs exist to pursue their parochial interests was attested to by some interviewees (including some political elites). This belief is held by both some government officials and opposition parties but becomes more evident whenever the CSOs make pronouncements or research findings that seemingly conflicts with the positions of these groups.

Some elite have even argued that "some (CSOs) are just money-making organizations" and that they are not accountable (Interview, 2014). Notwithstanding all these challenges that CSOs face in the conduct of their duties, due to their relative non-partisan approach, the three CSOs are respected by virtually all the main political actors in the country.

9. CSOs as monitoring agents

In the realm of CSOs, monitoring can be simply defined as the function of keeping policy honest (Najam, 2000). The study reveals that CSOs are very important key agents in the process of monitoring various activities in the country. Monitoring and evaluation accordingly enhances the effectiveness of the governance processes as well as institution building by establishing clear links between past, present and future interventions and results. Monitoring and evaluation can thus help the state to extract relevant information from past and ongoing activities that can subsequently be used as the basis for programmatic fine-tuning, reorientation and planning (UNDP, 2002).

With respect to the responsibility of monitoring, the study finds that IDEG has become an agency that monitors and evaluates Ghana's democracy every step of the way. In other words, the monitoring activity of IDEG is not just about elections- but the behaviour of politicians, policies of government as well as the way Parliament and even the security behaves. Thus, IDEG monitors, evaluates and shares ideas both with the specific agencies concerned and with other CSOs.

In a similar vein, the IEA also undertakes direct work to promote sustainable democracy in Ghana. For instance, during the 1996 presidential election, the IEA established a coalition of CSOs, i.e. Network of Domestic Election Observers (NEDEO) to monitor the election and it has since then played a major role in monitoring every major election in the country.

With respect to monitoring, it is noteworthy that CDD is the founding secretariat of CODEO (a group of forty CSOs) which as at now is one of the most prominent organisations that monitors elections and other related matters in the country. The point should be made clear that alliances between organisations to achieve common objectives indeed remain a permanent feature of the civil society, and that only the precise objectives may change. Consequently, in Ghana's Fourth Republic, CSOs seem to form coalitions to increase the efficacy of their lobbying efforts as Whitfield (2002) has argued. Hence, CDD through its active involvement and steering of CODEO has been able to contribute immensely towards electoral integrity in the country. It has trained about five thousand Ghanaians to monitor elections in the country since the year 2000.

During 2008, IDEG in response to an appeal by the EC introduced the Civic Forum Initiative (CFI) which is a broad coalition of civil society actors with membership drawn from various CSOs to assist the Commission to clean up the national voters' register (IDEG, 2010; Interview, 2014). The overall objective of the CFI is to ensure peaceful and credible electoral management through active community and citizens' participation, and collaboration with relevant state institutions to foster national cohesion in Ghana. During the 2008 electioneering period, the CFI mobilized and trained a critical mass of about 1,000 citizens to serve as voter educators and election observers. The network also collaborated with the National Commission on Civic Education (NCCE) and community radio networks to carry out voter education and observation exercises for voters' register exhibition. Further, CFI collaborated with the National Peace Council (NPC) to reduce the heightened tension, which characterized the 2008 elections, through confidence building measures and programmes of national solidarity.

Moreover, in 2010, the CFI in collaboration with the Governance Issues Forum (GIF) mounted platforms for electorates and community members in selected districts to engage aspiring candidates on electoral issues and their respective roles and responsibilities in community development. This eventually goes a long way in enlightening the electorates as well as equipping them with the skill to make the right choice. It also offers the opportunity for all the candidates to market themselves to the electorates.

In addition, the diverse nature of the membership CFI brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the planning, strategizing and execution of activities to promote national cohesion and development in the long run and this in turn promotes democratic deepening. Through the intervention of civil society, coupled with media vigilance, electoral campaigns have become issue-based and peaceful to a large extent.

10. Civil society and *advocacy*

Advocacy here refers to the role of CSOs in lobbying directly for the policy options they prefer or against those they oppose and which policy in turn influences positively on attempts at consolidating democracy in Ghana. Advocacy thus include the many activities that the CSOs undertake including media campaigns, public speaking, commissioning and publishing research or conducting exit poll, among others.

Consequently, the study found that through advocacy CSOs usually question the way in which policy is administered, and also participate in the agenda setting as they raise significant issues. CDD, IDEG and IEA therefore promote inclusiveness and engage duty bearers in many aspects of the governance process. They also propose policy solutions to the government and eventually open up the space for public argumentation. For instance, the study found that CDD works in a number of areas including constitutional reforms and election credibility and "these are the two major direct-impacting areas that CDD has done its work to enhance this country's democracy" (Interview, 2014). CDD is also a working member of the coalition that advocates the right of the disabled people and it has been able to work to ensure the coming into force of the Disability Act. Moreover, CDD is a member of the Freedom of Information Coalition and has been working for the passage of the Freedom of Information Act and all these have been possible through advocacy.

The study further found that CDD has made many contributions and recommendations to the Constitutional Review Committee. For instance, in 2010, the Centre joined other democratic stakeholders to call for the abolition of the indemnity clause which insulated individuals and persons affiliated to previous military regimes from prosecution. The Centre came to this conclusion based on a survey it conducted in four districts each from the Volta, Northern and Eastern Regions and five districts each from Ashanti and Greater Accra Regions to mobilize non-state, civil society and independent expert input into Ghana's constitution review and reform process. As a matter of fact, this survey sought to facilitate the process of the constitutional review and to help find long term solutions to Ghana's democracy, good governance and development deficits (GNA, 2010).

The IEA on the other hand through advocacy has arranged for various civic organizations and interest groups, as well as independent experts, to offer testimony and memoranda on proposed legislation before parliament. This new openness and collaboration has greatly expanded public participation in policy-making and enriched the whole deliberative process in the country (Gyimah-Boadi, 1998). Moreover, through the IEA's Ghana Political Parties Programme (GPPP), it has also brought the major political parties together to consider other IEA drafted legislations. These have included the Public Funding of Political Parties Bill, the Political Parties Bill and more recently the Presidential Transition Bill all of which seek to promote the deepening of democracy and good governance in the country.

Additionally, though IEA, CDD, and IDEG may not always play a direct role in implementing policy themselves, they do offer technical advice and expertise on how such policies might be better implemented. Thus, they usually provide clear and independent explanations of the processes thereby taking much of the heat from discussions in order to mark out the key issues for debate. Their technical expertise, combined with their presumably impartial political stance gives assurance to competing parties for fairness.

11. CSOs and peace-building

In relation to peace-building, the study found that CSOs have contributed enormously first to restoring multiparty democracy in the country. Secondly, most of these CSOs have broadened and erased the suspicion and antagonism that used to characterize inter-party activities. CSOs have brought the Youth Organizers of the various political parties together to form the Interparty Youth Committee (IPYC). Thus through the IPYC, these youth organizers come together and use the same platform to promote their parties position on various agendum while they mingle and interact with each other in the presence of their various supporters.

IEA in a similar vein brought the general secretaries of the various political parties together first in 2003 then followed it with the chairmen caucus and these are two relevant innovative ways of bridging the gap and seemingly enmity that hitherto existed between political parties in the country, especially the NDC and NPP. The IEA's IPAC (in collaboration with the EC) as well as the GPPP together with the Political Parties Code of Conduct all give credence to the innovative means by which CSOs in Ghana are trying to promote peace, understanding, good governance, and accountability and

consequently democratic consolidation. The IPAC consequently offers a two-way channel of information for both the EC and the political parties. It has enabled the EC to discuss all aspects of its programmes and activities with the parties and to elicit input and address problems, protests and disagreements whenever they were aired by any group. Eventually, the political parties are able to express their views freely and openly about EC programmes and activities and to bring their concerns to the table. Despite that fact that the IPAC process has its hiccups, it has succeeded in achieving compromise solutions to such contested matters as a single day for both parliamentary and presidential elections, photo ID cards and transparent ballot boxes and also gained the active involvement of the party agents in the registration exercise as observers (Frempong, 2008).

Moreover, IDEG through the GIF and CFI have introduced into the country various innovative ways of handling governance related issues both at the local and national levels. Thus, within a period of two years, (between 2004 and 2006), IDEG convened a series of national conferences and governance issues forums. At the first conference which was held in April 2004, participants endorsed a decision to undertake a series of exercises to open up public spheres for getting community-defined priorities on the table of decision makers (AfriMAP, 2007). Accordingly, in 2005 IDEG established the GIF as the mechanism to promote public policy dialogue that includes a broader spectrum of non-state actors in civil society and the private sector. The GIF which is an integrative participatory mechanism was thus designed and introduced by IDEG to promote citizens participation in decision-making and development planning at the local and national level. As an integrative concept, the GIF combines skills upgrading and public policy knowledge building with institutional platforms for effective civic engagement.

In addition, IDEG on November 27, 2012 in collaboration with the National Peace Council (NPC) and the Asantehene-Otumfuo Osei Tutu II organized the landmark event which has come to be known as the "Kumasi Declaration" which witnessed the presence of Ghana's ex-presidents, Rawlings and Kufuor as well as the members of the NPC, the National House of Chiefs, the Chief Justice Theodora Wood and all the presidential candidates contesting the 2012 general elections (except the CPP candidate-Abu Sakara Forster, who was represented by the running mate). At this all-important gathering, the various stakeholders and political elites pledged to accept peacefully the outcome of the forthcoming elections and appended their signature to the "declaration" which was witnessed by the Chief Justice in the presence of the most powerful and popular King in the country. This particular event was indeed one of a kind, and the first of such event in the nation's history.

Further, IDEG met the leadership of all the political parties including Nana Akufo Addo, Totobi Kwarkye, Captain Kojo Tsikata, etc., when the election verdict was sent to court by the opposition's (NPP) presidential candidate. This was done silently and no media house was aware. This "secret meeting" was meant to discuss how to maintain the peace after the court ruling and it was after the successful meeting that IDEG in collaboration with other entities organized a Peace Summit in Accra (Interview, 2014).

Upon enquiries on as to whether these particular events (namely the Kumasi Declaration, "Secret Meeting", and Peace Summit) in any way influenced the attitude of political elites and their parties' decisions and actions (especially with regards to the acceptance of the court verdict), virtually all the responses were in the affirmative, except for one party that believes that they are 'the apostles of democracy in Ghana'. According to them:

> We believe in the rule of law. You have to believe in it first, before you even go to the IEA, IDEG, and all that because trust me, the IEA, IDEG, CDD and all that can't impose anything on us. They can't .... you need to believe in what you are doing. If you believe that the court can settle this electoral dispute and that it's not good to resort to violence ... it's not the IEA or IDEG or that platform that was created .... Once we believed in it and the opportunities were created by the IEA and the others, it was a natural thing that was flowing .... I don't

think that it was because of those platforms that necessarily enabled the acceptance of the verdict. (Interview, 2014)

The implication as can directly be drawn from the above assertion is that the Kumasi declaration would not be of any use if the political elites and parties in the first place do not believe in democratic values and principles. However, the relentless efforts by civil society consequently averted the well-founded fears about election-day and post-election violence and its potentially dire consequences.

12. CSOs and civic engagement

In terms of the work of CSOs and civic engagement, the study here is considering CSOs as directly acting to fulfill a service need (in the governance process), especially to the marginalized and under-served in the community. Consequently, the study finds that CSOs embark on a host of services that the ordinary Ghanaian eventually benefits from and these services are usually in the form of educating the citizenry on a number of issues of public concern and giving them the opportunity to seek clarification on such issues.

The study finds that CDD as well as IDEG have been organizing parliamentary candidates' debate (platforms) in every election since 2004 and these platforms are aimed at introducing a certain measure of accountability and also enhancing issue-based politics. In a related issue, one expert argues that "IDEG has been engaged in voter education almost every election" and this has been confirmed by the representatives of the various political parties. The expert notes further that:

> In multi-ethnic societies like Ghana, there is the danger that if you do not give voter education to the people, they will focus on ethnicity, personality and neglect issues. When you do voter education, you are able to focus the attention of the voters on issue-based politics …. We have been doing voter education all over the country. (Interview, 2014)

One major service that IEA provides to the majority of Ghanaians is the conduct of the Presidential and Vice Presidential debates. Thus, in the year 2000, the IEA organized the first ever Presidential debate in the country with the debates being held every election year since. In 2008, the Vice-Presidential debates were included for the first time. This particular program is by far one of the most popular and far reaching events on the Ghanaian calendar, particularly during an election year. With regards to this event, political elites have affirmed that "the whole idea of presidential debate is good. Good in the sense that it provides the platform for people to listen to ideas and to debate which ideas best serves this nation" (Interview, 2014).

Despite the importance that has been attached to these presidential debates, the research also found that it is by far the most "controversial" CSO activity that has ever been introduced into the nation's politics in the Fourth Republic, especially regarding elections. Virtually all the respondents (with the exception of two CSO experts who have both being in a top level position in IEA) have questions that pertain to the mode of selection of candidates for the debates. It must thus be stated here that the various CSOs have their own rules of engagement and by this fact, the IEA's Presidential Debate platform is given to only those political parties with at least one seat in Ghana's Parliament.

Though most of the respondents agree to the fact that the IEA have every right to determine who utilizes the platform, they unanimously believe that an equal platform should be provided for all the contesting candidates including the independent candidates. As a matter of fact, it has been argued that:

> … democracy is about choice. So the question is "what choices are you giving to the people"? Are you limiting their choices or you are giving them all the choices available? So in the true essence of democracy, you must open up and give the choices to everybody to pick …. But if we cut it off then we are not really promoting the diversity of ideas. (Interview, 2014)

In a similar vein, another politician has stated that:

All the other political parties should be given the same platform by the IEA's presidential debate …. IEA is a very necessary institution but where it went wrong was in regards with the selection of the candidates for the presidential debates …. When you do that (support big parties and neglect the smaller ones) you kill the small parties and thus kill democracy. (Party Presidential Candidate, Interview, 2014).

Consequently, it has been argued by the various political parties (including those who have been given the IEA's debate platform) that the IEA's Presidential Debate-selection process has discriminated against certain political parties. The argument is that by preventing some parties from participating, they confuse the electorate and distort the process by creating an uneven playing field. Thus, this particular activity of the IEA according to most of the parties serves as a challenge to them since they are not included in the debate. Some of the political parties have even described the entire debate and the seemingly discrimination it engenders against some political parties in the electioneering process as a disservice and dishonor to multiparty democracy. According to these parties:

As long as a constitution is recognizing a multiparty democracy, if two thousand political parties are allowed to register and contest elections, all their candidates must be given a fair chance for the citizens to look at, otherwise, none of them should be given an opportunity (Interview, 2014).

Notwithstanding all these criticisms and dissatisfaction among the disaffected political parties with regards to the question of the criteria by which the IEA selects candidates, the Institute has advanced a number of reasons to explain its position and the first on the list is with regards to finance and the issue of limited resources. Moreover, to ensure a well-organized and issued based debate, quality must be placed ahead of quantity. In addition, the smaller parties should work very hard to win at least a seat in the nation's Parliament.

The point should however be reiterated that although elections form a key mechanism for the popular control of government, they are of limited effectiveness on their own without institutions that secure a government's continuous accountability to the public (Beetham, 1998) and as such the IEA's presidential debate is only one of the several means of ensuring good governance and democratic consolidation in a limited manner. Much more must be done. The debate should go beyond the electioneering year. There should be "mid-term" debates with regard to good governance, the economy, etc.

13. CSOs as capacity builders

CSOs as capacity builders attempts to look at the role CSOs play by providing support to communities, institutions of state or other CSOs and related bodies.

Bearing in mind that the consolidation of democracies can either be obstructed or destroyed by the effects of scrawny institutions, building the capacity of institutions becomes a necessary element that all nations that attempt to consolidate their democracies should make a priority.

Commenting on the significance of capacity building and the role that CSOs would have to play to ensure civility in Ghanaian politics, one party representative questioned: "how can democracy be sustained when the people are ignorant about why we are voting"? It is therefore asserted that strengthening institutions to provide civil education is very important and CSOs should help in this instead of organizing "big conferences" for a few politicians and elites all the time. In effect, it is believed that increasing citizen competence and participation in the political process will eventually spill over into other arenas of social life of the citizenry. Thus civic engagement, such as participation in voluntary associations and community networks would consequently generate trust, reciprocity, and cooperation, which eventually reduces distrust and encourages political participation and stability, and thus deepening of democracy in the long run. It must also be stated that by facilitating the

development of civic and political skills through capacity building, many CSOs in Ghana, especially the IEA, CDD, and IDEG do serve as "free schools for democracy" (Gyimah-Boadi, 1996).

In the case of capacity building, the study finds that the IEA serves as a conduit where political parties get some resources from the Netherland's Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD). Thus, the study finds that the NIMD supports the four political parties with representation in the Ghanaian Parliament and that this support is channeled through the IEA. According to the Director of Elections at the EC, "other CSOs should be emulating what the IEA and others are doing" (Interview, 2014). He is of the view that capacity building programs should "run the day after the declaration of the results" and that "it should be part of the system" since it is very useful for consolidation.

CDD on the other hand has asserted that they are a non-partisan organisation and that in areas that they think political parties' capacities have to be improved, "we set up those processes and platforms to improve their capacities" (Interview, 2014). Accordingly, CDD through its numerous activities and programs such as the "I Am Aware" project and the "Kronti ne Akwamu" lectures empowers both citizens and the political elites with information that enhances accountability between citizens and public officials. Thus through building civic skills and education among Ghanaian citizens, the Centre builds the capacity of the individuals which eventually has ripple effects on the consolidation agenda as accountability is ensured.

Moreover, through seminars and workshops, the CSOs present ideas and training to the staff of the EC, the Parliament, as well as other important state institutions. For instance the IEA assisted the Parliament of Ghana in carrying out its functions by training legislative research assistants in 1996 to work in Parliament (Interview, 2014).

On the part of IDEG, a series of activities was also noted as means of building capacity for individuals and institutions. These include the CFI and the GIF as well as the Poverty Inequality and Sustainable Development (PISD). The GIF is an integrative participatory mechanism designed and introduced by IDEG in 2004 to promote citizens participation in decision-making and development planning at the local and national level (IDEG, 2010). It combines skills upgrading and public policy knowledge building with institutional platforms for effective civic engagement. The goal of the GIF is thus to enhance the capacity of citizens and local communities to participate effectively in public decision-making through purposeful collaboration with duty bearers in order to ensure equitable and accountable development (Interview, 2014).

One former head of state of Ghana (Gen. I.K. Acheampong) is reported to have said that democracy cannot survive if there is no economic justice, and as such, the issue of one man one vote should be equated to "one man, one bread". In other words, democracy cannot survive on an empty stomach and as a matter of fact any attempt to consolidate a democracy without economic justice would eventually be a fruitless attempt (Botchway, 2018). In view of this, youth employment, one of the issues identified and discussed during the 2005 GIF by citizens in 22 districts as a pressing problem in the communities was offered an historic allocation in the 2006 national budget. In September of that same year, 2006, IDEG organized the "National Conference on Civic participation in the National Budget Process", which was convened to offer civil society and other non-state actors an opportunity to stake a claim in the budget-making process (IDEG, 2010; Interview, 2014). The conference consequently created space for interaction between high-level decision makers in the public sector, civil society and the private sector as a whole.

Interestingly, since the GIF was introduced 1,000 citizens have been trained in public deliberation methodologies, lobbying and advocacy, dialogue and policy engagement thus building their capacities which in turn impacts positively on efforts at consolidating Ghana's democracy.

14. Summary

There will be no real democratic consolidation until education and training have reached all layers of the population. In other words, the degree of literacy is a good indicator for any efforts at consolidating democracy, and in this respect, CSOs are seen as one of the most effective institutions to carry out this responsibility of educating both the "elite" and "ordinary" Ghanaian. Thus, strengthening the institutions that are responsible for educating Ghanaians on what the role that each state institution should perform cannot be taken for granted (Mornah, 2014).

CSOs in Ghana have led and stimulated public discussions on national policy issues aimed at generating knowledge and enhancing the capacity of citizens to influence public policy choices in the country. Thus, together with some other CSOs, the IEA, CDD-Ghana and IDEG have taken an increasingly active role in public policy issues and have, through various recommendations from research analysis and consultative forums, made immense contributions to policy discussion and decision in the country. Consequently, their expertise in their specific areas and their dynamism have eventually earned them credibility and recognition by government and major stakeholders to engage in public policy dialogue.

Moreover, the IEA, CDD and IDEG inculcate civic virtues into members of the community through their various programs, and such virtues usually included attention to the public good, habits of cooperation, toleration, respect for others and for the rule of law, willingness to participate in public life, self-confidence, and efficacy. These CSOs are therefore important schools of democracy and democratic consolidation because they teach citizens skills that are necessary for all manner of political action both at the local and national levels.

15. Conclusion

The study concludes that Ghanaian CSOs have over the years organized and mobilized people to monitor the country's elections, especially within the Fourth Republic and that their independent monitoring have helped in ensuring credibility of elections over the years.

In addition, CSOs in the country have played advocacy roles by stimulating public discussions of issues of national interests and concern and this has resultantly enhanced the capacity of citizens to appreciate policy dynamics in the country. As a matter of fact, CSOs have inculcated into the citizenry civic virtues and the principles of good governance and democracy in general. It is thus evident from the study that to a very large extent, CSOs are responsible for the prevailing culture of cooperation, relative tolerance, respect for the rule of law and consequently the mass participation of citizens in public affairs.

Furthermore, CSOs have provided enlightenment to the citizenry on various aspects of democracy, as such helping the average Ghanaian to comprehend and appreciate major important facets of the country's young democracy. A clear illustration of this point is the fact that the presidential as well as constituencies' parliamentary debates have stimulated political liveliness, ideological awakening, and mass participation in both national and local level politics.

CSOs' input in development processes is increasingly valued by donors and government. This is visible, for instance, in the general consultations on national policies and CSO participation in key national policy dialogue meetings and consultations over the years.

In conclusion, the study reveals that the activities of CSOs in Ghana have indeed impacted positively on the country's efforts at consolidating her democracy.

16. Recommendations

Necessary measures should be put in place to enhance the capacity of the IEA to enable it organize the Presidential debate more effectively. However, the debate should not be left in the hands of the

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IEA if it lacks the capacity to ensure that all the contesting stakeholders are given equal opportunity to the platform.

CSOs should be non-partisan and objective in all their activities. Being objective here means letting their activities be informed by evidence-based research and verifiable by other international or sub-regional CSOs. They should produce impeccable information to hold the balance between extreme debates between political parties.

Since the role of CSOs is essential, government should create an enabling environment for CSOs to thrive, be confident, and unbiased. CSOs should be seen as development partners not antagonists.

Finally, CSOs must set an example in transparency and accountability. This would enable others to take them serious when they raise issues with regards to accountability and transparency.

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