## CHALLENGES TO THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS IN AFRICA

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 **ABSTRACT**

The role of civil society in the democratization process in Africa has been an area of intense debate in recent times. High poverty levels, coupled with the inability of many African governments to provide basic needs of their people, have resulted in high illiteracy rates among the grassroots people. In Africa, a strong civil society movement has been weakened by the inability to get adequate financial resources and sustain human resources, which would project the objectives of the organizations. The resultant alternative of resorting to foreign donors in order to meet the organizational operational costs have consequently cost the civic organizations both their independence and ability to make independent decision without having to dance to the tune of the donors. This has further compromised the relationship between the state and civil society as it now is bordered on suspicion, with governments accusing civil society of being used as a conduit to destabilize African countries. The situation facing civil society organizations in Africa has been further exacerbate by the increasing vindictiveness of many African leaders who view civil society organizations as destabilization agents which should not be given an opportunity to contribute to national debates, since they are bent on serving the interests of foreign donors who, in most cases, are the former colonial masters. The continued existence of ex-dictators in active politics or in influential positions in many African countries, most of whom ruled with an iron hand, have remained a threat to the restoration or deepening of democratic institutions within the African continent.

 **Key Words:**  democracy; civil society; governance

## INTRODUCTION

The normative nature of the terms 'democracy' and 'civil society' have been highly debatable among different societies in space and time (Mafeje, 1998). Civil society has a pivotal role to play in the democratization process, especially given that it "manufactures political consent, [and as such] it is the source of the legitimization of state power" (Bratton, 1994). By this assertion, the role in the democratization process is that it [civil society] can make or break democracy in any given geographical location by virtue of its influence on people. Current debates on the deepening and consolidation of democracy have a distinct bias towards the introduction of participatory approaches that will enable citizens to take up their citizenship rights (Esau, 2006). In healthy democracies, the government is mandated to create participatory spaces through key legislation. Esau (2006) states that these processes require that citizens become engaged with the state so as to enhance state responsiveness; ensure watchfulness and accountability and influence the policy that affects their livelihood (Esau,2006). Gaventa (2006) argues that "…emerging debates within 'deepening democracy' focuses on developing and sustaining more substantive and empowered citizen participation in the democratic process than is often found in representative democracy alone." Barnett and Low (2004) analyze these notions by arguing that the relationship between state and society has been replaced by more complex governance arrangements to formulate and implement solutions to public problems.

However, civil society organizations in Africa have been besieged by a plethora of logistical and viability problems which have eventually compromised their operations as campaigners of democracy and human rights, resulting in seeking foreign funding and intervention as the discussion below will highlight.

## CIVIL SOCIETY, DEMOCRACY AND THE AFRICAN CONTINENT-A THEORETICAL STATEMENT

### Civil Society

The term "civil society" is used, loosely, to refer to a diffuse collective existence outside formally organized structures of the state, such as official parties, the church, and, presumably, trade unions, NGOs, and youth and women's organizations (Mafeje, 1998). Gramsci popularized the term, but encountered problems in locating it in space and defining it with some precision.  He ended up settling

for a definition which portrayed civil society as "those alliances which enjoy the greatest ideological resonance in society at a given time" (Gramsci, 1971), thereby giving the Roman Catholic Church in Italy prominence. In Latin America and Africa, as it is shown by its involvement in popular struggles, the church has become an important part of civil society and is often fighting with tyrannical regimes in both regions (Ake, 1996).

Much of the debates around civil society's involvement in the democratization process have articulated the civil society movement as having tremendous implications for shaping and pluralizing power relations (Keane, 1988a), broadening the avenues of societal representation of interests and of individual and group influence and participation (Harbeson, 1992), creating a new political culture of citizenship that stresses rights, obligations, protest and contestation (Grindle, 1996), and prompting political liberalization (Keane, 1998). Civil society plays the crucial role of legitimating state power through norm setting of operative rules of politics, and the reconstruction of public responsibility (Bratton, 1992; Azarya, 1992; Patterson, 1998). Hence, it has been rightly argued that "the legitimacy of a political leader's claim to exercise state power thus derives from civil society" (Chazan, 1994).

Empirical evidence has shown that civil society has been associated with much of the transformation of Sub-Saharan nations towards democratic, transparent, and accountable governance, having been heavily active in the popular struggles for democratization in South Africa, Congo, Niger, Guinea, Mauritania, and Nigeria, and multiparty democracy in Gabon, Cameroun, Kenya, Malawi, and Zambia (Makumbe, 1998). Grindle (1996), in a study of eight Latin American and African countries, found out that an invigorated civil society heightened public debates, media criticisms, political mobilization and public agitation, and contestation for increased participation over policy and governance, resulting in the opening up of space for negotiation, redefinition and re-constitution of state-society and state-economy relations. The activities of active civil society in the democratization and anti-statist projects are enumerated by Diamond (1997), to include "challenging abuses, strengthening the rule of law, monitoring human rights, educating citizens about rights and responsibilities, building a culture of civic engagement, enhancing state responsiveness to societal interests and needs, and building a constituency for economic as well as political reforms".

Beyond democratization processes are crucial roles of democratic sustenance, and civil society is expected to protect the democratic values of pluralism, accountability, responsibility and participation in governance processes (Keane, 1988a; Imam & Jibrin, 1991), and the nature and strength of civil society in Africa's fledging civil societies have helped to determine the prospects for democratic consolidation (Hyden and Bratton, 1992).

It is against this backdrop that the importance of civil society in the creation and strengthening of democratic institutions has been highlighted, given that through civil societies "…citizens are able to participate in and exert influence over public life" Harbeson (1994). Its reconciliatory role in society has been portrayed in recent debates where it has been indicated that civil society establishes bridges between society and government, and as such, acts as a "…buffer between government and society, acts as a broker and a political norm setter as well as an agent of change regulator of the processes of participation in societal affairs and as an integrator of groups articulating different political interests…" Harbeson (1994). However, while it could be true that there exists a symbiotic relationship between civil society and democracy, other scholars have argued differently by maintaining that there is a clear-cut separation between civil society and the state by pointing out that "…civil and political society [are] separate realms [and this claim] helps to defend the claim that it is possible to support democracy without becoming involved in partisan politics or otherwise interfering unduly in the domestic politics of another country" (Carothers & Ottaway, 2000).

Seligman (1992) calls for the "new analytic key that will unlock the mysteries of the social order" implying that it is through the employment of civil society to act as a watchdog on state activities. The recent interest of the UN and the World Bank in human rights issues has come about as a result of an attempt to define 'good governance'" (UN Report, 2000; World Bank, 2004). In order to attract attention to the need for the preservation of human rights and strengthening the democratic institutions within states, especially in the Developing World, the UN and IMF attracted conditionalities which should be fulfilled before countries get financial assistance. It is against this background that civil society has been, until recently, been closely associated with democracy, the observance of human rights and good governance. It is also these areas that civil society has tended to put their emphasis on and to model their objectives and *modus operandi* on how best democratic tenets can be articulated. Failure by states to conform to democratic tenets of democracy, human rights, and good governance has not only denied

them the chance to secure financial support from the Bretton Woods Institutions, they have also met in civil unrest and disturbances.

Available literature has indicated that "civil society is today the main analytic paradigm in African politics and is romantically associated with the wave of popular protests and social mobilization that has resulted in democratization since the early 1990s" World Bank, 1992; Clark, 1990; Chazan 1992; Hyden and Bratton,1992; Young, 1992).

The resurgence of the civil society movement maintains that in Africa, civil society has long been associated with decolonization and the subsequent transformation from colonial rule to the post-colonial period was characterized by "…the development of powerful popular movements in most African colonies when large numbers of workers entered the arena of organized political activity…"(Mamdani, 1990). But the economic and political crises of the 1980s and 1990s in Africa and Latin America gave rise to social movements based on common interests and identities and 'local community and non-governmental organizations that sought greater autonomy' to find "grassroots solutions to economic and social problems and make collective demands on government" (Grindle, 1996). The emergent civil society groups were engaged in struggles against despotic rulers, repressive regimes and state violations of individual and collective rights (Makumbe, 1998), and their struggle was in pursuit of the democratization project (Ikelegbe, 2001).

Ikelegbe (2001) has pointed out that "the euphoria and romanticism with the civil society-democracy project has clouded. Those very few scholars who have addressed the weaknesses of civil society have done so as organizational and ideological entities, and not as an entity. However, there are those who argue that civil society can also constitute a divergent and sometimes centrifugal pull that can be threatening to society and the state (Abutudu, 1995). The plural and diverse nature of civic groups with competing loyalty and claims, engaged in various forms of struggle, may comprise incoherence and conflicts that may be inimical to the democratic project itself (Abutudu, 1995). However, Narsoo (1991) regards the diversity and number of civil society groups in relation to the depth of society's democratic content, which groups, Azarya (1992) asserts, may have parochial and inward-looking agendas.

While Harbeson (1992) have argued that civil society may act as "broker, buffer, symbol, agent, regulator, integrator, representative and midwife of different values" but these sentiments may or may not facilitate democracy. There is also a danger about the nature of expressions of group interests,

because while protests may be romanticized in the democratic struggle, characterized by collective activism in confrontation with the state, but excessive violence in the struggle for particularized objectives may rather paralyze and ultimately undermine the democratic project itself (Abutudu, 1995). The organizational and ideological weaknesses of civil society have been attributed to problems of crippling poverty, corruption, nepotism, parochialism, opportunism, ethnicism, illiberalism, and willingness to be co-opted within state structures, thereby rendering them voiceless (Makumbe, 1998; Diamond, 1997). Much of African civil society lacks autonomous existence and self-sustaining capacities, and depends on foreign donors and sometimes on the state itself, resulting in foreign donors determining the agenda of interest which in some cases may run against those of the civil groups (Diamond, 1997). Internal structures and operations of some civic groups reflect the absence of democratic values and tenets such as participation, consensus, and competition (Ikelegbe, 2001). Some civic groups even lack in-depth knowledge and awareness of the workings of government, and the making and consequences of public policy, and are therefore lack the intellectual capacity to challenge government (Ikelegbe, 2001). Makumbe (1998) notes that groups may articulate ethnic, regional, cultural and sectional interests and as a result civil society degenerates into an arena of intense conflict between civil groups of interests organized along these lines and these weaknesses undermine the capacity and potential of civil society and eventually reduce its effectiveness.

## 'Unpacking' Democracy

It was not until the intensification of popular struggles for democracy in the 1970s and 1980s that African scholars turned their attention specifically to the question of democracy on the continent and began to 'unpack' the concept. Before this, most had been preoccupied with development issues such as 'dependency' and 'underdevelopment', capitalism versus socialism (and which one is workable and practical); class-formation (based on the Marxist/Leninist ideologies); and the role of workers and peasants in development (Mafeje, 1998). All these topics lent themselves to the grand theories which tended to draw away the attention of African intellectuals from people's everyday struggles. This was not to say there was lack of awareness of the growing disillusionment with "independence" among ordinary people since the 1970s, but that their struggles had not yet assumed dramatic proportions, as they were to do in the 1980s. By the 1980s, post-independence events and developments on the African continent forced intellectuals to focus on developments at home. The euphoria brought about by the attainment of independence began to diminish as people began to realize that they were not getting what

they had fought for: better and improved working and living conditions, accountability by government and above all the enactment of restrictive legislation reminiscent of the colonial period. Oppressive regimes began to emerge. As scholars began to explore the reasons and possible solutions to the developments of dictators on the continent, they discovered a trend among the African citizenry. By the end of the decade, they had gathered so much momentum that they began to question the concept of self-styled "life-presidents" on the African continent and whether these had the mandate of the people. Debates around what democracy really entailed began to emerge. Scholars and political scientists began to deliberate on what constitutes democracy. They were in unanimous agreement that as long as something is done in the name of the people, it could be defined as democratic. They pointed out that democracy is any phenomena based on the participation of common citizens in political debates and consultation and that democratic decision-making, in contrast to bureaucratic or technocratic decision making, is based on the assumption that all who are affected by a given decision have the right to participate in the making of that decision (Mandaza & Sachikonye, 1991).

However, they were some who were pessimistic about the way democratic institutions were operating in many countries, and these began to take a confrontational attitude towards democracy, especially given that although some states satisfied the minimum criteria for them to be classified as democracies, but they left a lot to be desired. This resulted in the emergence of a crop of scholars and institutions that view democracy not only on the positive side, but with negative underpinnings. USAID Democracy & Governance (2001), defines democracy as "…programmes that promote the rule of law and human rights, transparent and fair elections coupled with a competitive political process, a free and independent media, stronger civil society and greater citizen participation in government, and governance structures that are efficient, responsive and accountable". First and foremost, much of the media on the African continent are state-controlled and those independent media houses are gagged under restrictive media laws that are selectively applied. Bingu Wa Mutharika (1995) argues that even in a democracy, "…the masses can still be oppressed by the system or excluded from the decision-making processes by the same system that they will have installed and that human rights abuses can still take place even under plural democracy". It is this crop of Africa scholars who took the democratic debate on the African continent to greater heights, resulting in the incorporation of civil society as the most appropriate catalyst and promoter of democratic institutions.

Scholars who attempted to come up with *one-size-fits-all* generic definitions of democracy but these have not sufficed, especially given the dynamic and evasive political developments on the African continent. While some scholars have portrayed democracy as *"…the participation of the largest possible number of those concerned with the organisation of society; majority rule; the existence of real alternative, and others have expressed it as initiatives that encourage citizen participation in public decision-making are more successful in societies that adhere to democratic governance, are open to public debate and criticism of those in authority, and allow independent civil society organisations to take root"* (Paul, 2005). Another school of thought has based its definition of democracy on the simple principle that when making an important public decision, the majority vote should prevail because the will of the majority outweighs the wants of the minority (Leftwich, 1993). The HSRC incorporates grassroots people in its definition of democracy by asserting it as "… a government by consent, giving all citizens (including grassroots people) an equal chance to influence the process of government, and entails the participation of everybody in whatever decision is taken" (HSRC, 2003). In practical terms, grassroots have always been used as the electorate, and in recent times, these are the people worst affected by the wrath of the state machinery as they face harassment due to participation in civic activities viewed by governments in Africa as meant to destabilize the state.

Elections in most African countries have left scholars gasping for breath and seeking new definitions of what democracy entails. Despite the existence and continued emergence of more fancy (though dubious) definitions of democracy, developments on the political scene have presented many challenges to those who want to put in place the best definition of democracy, especially on the African continent where goal-posts are changed overnight. The conventional *first-past-the-post* phenomenon has been regarded as the barometer to determine the winner in an election contest. But in some countries on the African continent, one hears of a *run-off* (as was the case in Zimbabwe in March 2008 when the opposition won the elections) where the winner is regarded as having won, but not with sufficient enough votes to form a government. Democracy as the "participation of the largest number of people" as a definition has failed to suffice, given the emergence of Governments of national unity (GNUs) in many African countries in recent times, with those in Kenya and Zimbabwe having been the most visible. The electorate has find themselves getting short-changed as winners in elections are forced to share the stage with the losers. And calling such an arrangement democracy has tended to be an insult to the electorate themselves, who should have the ultimate say on who should preside over them. This means for Political

Science scholars, it becomes a vicious circle as more sinister political arrangements present themselves and scholars are required to put a name tag to the [democratic] arrangement.

There are those scholars who argue that democracy is not an end in itself but an ongoing process which should be cultivated and inculcated and be allowed to grow within a society (Gaventa, 2006). Given the aforementioned scenario, political opponents would maintain such acrimony that coming to the negotiating table would be almost impossible, unless with the persuasion (and at times coercion) of fellow African neighbouring countries and allies. While current debates around democracy have tended to be associated with participation, Nelson and Wright (1995) have added their voice by portraying democracy as 'empowering the weakest and poorest'. However, practically the opposite have always been true, especially given the cutthroat competition that political leaders find themselves embroiled in thereby turning a mere political contest into a survival of the fittest scenario. Again it is the politically strong who would grow even stronger and there is no room for the lame ducks in the cut-throat politics of Africa where patronage, corruption and nepotism are the order of the day. Gaventa, (2006) notes that democratic decentralisation focuses on the question of citizen participation, citizen engagement and the strategies and opportunities to achieve this are by way of incorporating civil society. Although it is universally acknowledged that in a democracy, full democratic citizenship is attained not only through the exercise of political and civic rights, but also through social rights, which in turn may be gained through participatory processes (Gaventa, 2006), but politics in many African countries have made a mockery of all these tenets of democracy. What is required is not all about politicking, but total emancipation of citizens and their freedom to enjoy various freedoms and rights as enshrined in their respective constitutions and other international protocol and conventions.

**Deepening Participatory Democracy**

Despite efforts by citizens through civil society organizations to institute democratic institutions, challenges have been encountered as the dictators controlling political institutions have seemed reluctant to provide opportunities for democracy institutions to be put in place, safeguarded, strengthened and even sustain it.

Donors and multilateral institutions have joined in the furore by identifying the '…the biases towards elitism or lack of public accountability found in traditional democratic institutions" (Gaventa, 2006). Scholars have also expressed the view that while a robust civil society can serve as additional check and balance on government behavior, through mobilizing claim, advocating for special interests, playing a watchdog role, and generally exercising countervailing power against the state (Gaventa, 2006), and as "…the single most viable alternative to the authoritarian state and the tyrannical market and constitutes the missing link in the success of social democracy" (Edwards, 2005). While these definitions may be impressive, but the prohibitive nature pieces of legislation guiding civil society participation in governance processes in many African countries have disempowered much of the civil society movement.

Debates have also raged on the existence of an egalitarian redistribution of power and society in a democracy (Pellizzoni, 2003). This is an ideal situation which is rather difficult to attain, especially given the 'get-rich-by-night' attitude of many politicians in Africa. Wealth cannot distributed equitably in a place where politics have been turned into a commercial venture where those who are in power today need to amass as much wealth as possible because tomorrow is the turn of others. Participation has ceased to be points of leverage from which to achieve a more egalitarian redistribution (Bachrach & Botwinick, 1999). Participatory democracy strives to create opportunities for all members of a political group to make meaningful contributions to decision-making, and seeks to broaden the range of people who have access to such opportunities (Seligman, 1992). Ackerman (2004)'s assertion that "…the best way to tap into the energy of society is through 'co-governance' which involves inviting social actors to participate in the core activities of the state" has become a façade, given that co-governance is abstract and impracticable unless government put institutions in place to cater for the needs and demands of civil society. However, given the uneasy relationship between state and civil society in Africa brought about by foreign financial support of civil society, co-governance would not be feasible because the state

would come under the impression that they have co-opted foreign influence into their political systems because many African governments are still under the impression that foreign governments are dictating to civil society organizations in Africa.

Scholars of deliberative democracy argue for a situation in which "…citizens address public problems by reasoning together about how best to solve them" and provides "…a shift from bargaining, interest aggression and power to the common reason of equal citizens" (Cohen & Fung, 2004), but situation on the ground defies equality of citizens. The ruling elite are conspicuous by their flamboyant lifestyle and abundant luxuries at the expense of the ordinary citizens, most of whom form the electorate. In context, the deliberative democracy is mainly concerned with '…the nature and quality of deliberation that does occur when citizens do come together for discussion and debates in public spheres" (Gaventa, 2006). However deliberative democracy has been criticized for '…favoring consensus at the expense of differences' (Chambers, 2003). Some proponents of the deliberative democratic strand argue that 'there will be trade-offs between the quality of deliberation and the depth and quantity of participation' (Gaventa, 2006). Given the foregoing debates on democracy, the article explores how democracy has fared on the African continent over the last two decades.

## DEMOCRACY ON THE AFRICAN CONTINENT-AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

It was not until the intensification of popular struggles for democracy in Africa in the 1980s that African scholars turned their attention specifically to the question of democracy on the continent. Before this, most of these scholars had been preoccupied with development issues such as 'dependency', capitalism versus socialism, class-formation, and the role of workers and peasants in development, (Mafeje, 1998) and all these are topics which lent themselves to grand theories which tended to draw away the attention of African intellectuals from people's everyday struggles (World Bank, 2007). Remarkable events of the period around the end of the 1980s, unprecedented since the massive nationalist politics of constitutional decolonization, have been sweeping through Africa, forcing changes in political arrangements and leading to the emergence of multi-partyism and political pluralism, a new emphasis of the importance of human rights, dialogue between political opponents, and the liberalization of the erstwhile post-colonial polities (Hyden & Bratton, 1992; Mamdani & Wamba dia Wamba, 1995).

Democracy in Africa has presented many challenges. The popular and much-talked-about movement for democracy in Africa have tended to revolve around three major demands, namely; the abolition of the

one-party state in favor of democratic pluralism; decentralization of power which would give rise to greater local autonomy; and respect for human rights and the rule of law by African governments (Mafeje, 1998). These demands have not simply been an expression of general disillusionment with independence whose leaders had failed to deliver on their pre-independence promises, but a revulsion against African governments whose legitimacy has been heavily eroded by their becoming unbearably autocratic and oppressive. It therefore comes as no surprise that many African governments had become progressively oppressive and their presidents had turned into ruthless dictators (Mafeje,1998) who had not only failed to deliver but also after 20 years of independence their countries had overwhelmingly fallen into a political abyss. Also, largely due to their own doing, their economies had been plunged into the deepest crisis of all time. This turn of events has, in turn, elicited an economically perverse but politically expedient reaction from the ruling elites, namely, to defend their profligacy by denying the ordinary citizens the right to protect themselves against the implicit but illegitimate financial squeeze (Shivji, 1989). The ensuing financial crisis created a competitive situation for scarce resources within the increasingly impoverished African populations whose share in the total of the world poor rose from 16% in the 1960s to 40% by the end of the 1980s and is expected to reach two-thirds of the African population on the eve of the 21$^{st}$ century (World Bank, 1990). This scenario has but also engendered fierce competition among the different factions of the elite as resources dwindled and poverty levels rose to unprecedented levels among their populations. This has not only resulted in the African petit-bourgeois governments fast losing any legitimacy but also the political base of incumbent presidents had shrunk to a narrow circle of trusted friends, kinsmen, and clansmen and ethnic associates all of whom had survived on the political patronage of the ruling elite (Wamba dia Wamba, 1995). This has tended to increase the vulnerability of the decrepit regimes to any large-scale political upheaval from below (Wamba dia Wamba, 1995).

The restoration of democratic institutions in Africa has become a common cry, and this justifies the sudden resurgence of civil society groups on the continent. The post-independence epoch has been in recent years, experiencing debates on the restoration of democracy. The euphoria that encompassed many African countries soon after the attainment of political independence has since been replaced by gloom, civil wars, high poverty levels and above all the transformation from the once liberation war heroes to dictators. Corruption levels and greed have destroyed many African countries that have since been forced to approach their former colonial masters for 'aid packages'. The high poverty levels have

resulted in governments failing to sustain their own people. Worst affected by these developments have been civil society whose high illiteracy rate among its members have even exacerbated the situation and their ability to participate in governance processes.

In Southern Africa, civil society institutions like universities, labor movements and the church have been at the forefront of campaigning for the setting up of democratic institutions (Sachikonye, 1995). The SADC, as a regional body responsible with the setting up of democratic institutions in member states, was instrumental in coming up with the SADC Guidelines on the Conduct of Democratic Elections in 2004. These electoral laws are a guideline that binds SADC member states to adhere to democratic electoral principles. The involvement of the AU and SADC in the quest for the restoration of democracy in countries like Zimbabwe, and their involvement in peace-keeping missions in war-ravaged countries like the DRC and Sudan' Darfur region only goes to show the dominant role and inherent significance of civil society in democratization the African continent .

## CHALLENGES TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN AFRICA-A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The most outstanding challenge that civil society has faced in fighting for democracy on the African continent has been the lack of sufficient resources to do so. It has become common knowledge that most African countries "... are becalmed in a long-term economic crisis characterized by shrinking output per capita, escalating indebtedness, and falling living standards… [resulting] in people devoting most of their time  meeting daily needs of economic survival and family welfare" (Bratton, 1994). On the other hand, governments in some cases may not be able to meet their obligations to the people by their failure to provide for their peoples**.** Many financially-strapped African governments have been unable to sustain the investments in education and the adult literacy necessary to cultivate a web of public communication to enable the institution of interactional discourses and deliberation on societal issues. Low literacy rates among many African nations has therefore been another inhibiting factor in engaging in debates around governance, human rights and other political discourses. High poverty levels among the general citizenry have also contributed to the challenges bedeviling most of the continent's civil societies with the rich-poor divide widening each day. Societies, driven with wide and growing gaps between the rich and the poor, "...have become structurally ill-structured to the cultivation of norms of reciprocity and participation on which civil society is based"(Monga, 1993). Available literature has indicated that the

global association between stable democracy and advanced industrial economy suggests that democratic institutions (including civic institutions) are difficult to construct under conditions of mass economic privation and great social inequalities.

Debates around the failure of civil society organizations to sustain themselves have been concerned with their inability to mobilize sufficient financial resources from within the country. Available literature has indicated that due to the lack of sufficient financial resources from within their respective countries, many African civil society groups have ended up seeking financial assistance and donations from outside the continent. There certainly exists an African civil society which is actively seeking to raise the living standards of citizens as well as to promote and protect their rights and interests (Makumbe, 1998). The lack of such crucial resources as finance and an environment conducive to civic activity are major inhibitions to the development of Africa's civil society, and to combat these problems, Africa will need external donor support in various forms for quite some time to come (Makumbe, 1998). Reflecting on poverty of their clienteles, civic organizations in Africa "suffer gross shortages of material resources; they own few organizational assets, operate with tiny budgets, and are always understaffed" (Lemarchand, 1992). Faced with these deficiencies, civil society organizations have failed to portray their full potential or mobilize financial resources from prospective sources. Few precedents exist for mobilizing financial contributions through corporate sponsorship, user fees, or the payment of dues. Faced with precarious and desperate situation, civic organizations have usually turned to foreign donors "...to cover the costs of not only capital projects but also core operating expenses" (Bratton, 1994).

However, overdependence on foreign funding has had its own repercussions and several pathological consequences for the development for civil society. For example, the direction of accountability is reversed within the civic organization, with leaders now reporting to donors rather than to members or clients. Moreover, reliance on funds from abroad can be a political liability, reducing the credibility of claims by associations to be authentic advocates for domestic constituencies and enabling host governments to dismiss them as agents of foreign interests (Bratton, 1994). This eventually spoils the relationship between government and civil society such that any suggestions from civil society to government on how to institute or improve existing democratic structure s are not taken seriously by government, citing the involvement of foreign players within the civil society movement. This is usually

the reason why many African governments accuse civil society organizations in their countries as being conduits through which foreign funding is channeled through to destabilize their countries.

Many African leaders have deliberated at length on the impact of foreign funding for civil society groups in their respective countries. Western governments have been blamed for offering financial assistance to organizations to destabilize African countries. Many African leaders have often spoken against what they termed 'foreign intervention' in the internal affairs of their respective countries by western nations, despite their inability to offer financial assistance to civic organizations whose inability to mobilize adequate financial resources have land them to the mercy of foreign donors. Suspicion of the operations and motives of civil society have resulted in many African leaders having to regard civil society organizations as being used by western nations as conduits through which funds are channeled into the [African continent] for destabilization purposes (Moyo, Sachikonye & Raftopoulos, 1998). Despite the fact that many civil society organizations in Africa are poorly funded and lack financial means to cover operational costs, the majority of African governments are not prepared to commit funding to civil society organizations, a service which many western governments are readily prepared to provide. Some African governments have even enacted laws that prohibit the foreign funding for civil society organizations, a move meant to cripple civil society operations. Available literature indicate that inadequate financial resources among African civil society organizations has impacted on their decision-making capabilities as they are forced to be answerable to the donors and not to their clients within the civil society movement.

Proponents of foreign funding for African civil society have indicated that it is only through foreign capital injection for civil society organizations that these can be able to articulate their programs properly. Makumbe, (1998) points out that "the lack of such crucial resources such as finance and an environment conducive to civic activity are, however, major inhibitions to the development of Africa's civil society". He further notes that "in combating these problems, Africa will need external donor support in various forms for quite some time to come" (Makumbe, 1998). This possibly gives credibility to allegations by African leaders' (chiefly President Mugabe of Zimbabwe) who have repeatedly lashed out at civil society organizations as agents of imperialism bent on destabilizing African governments and that civil society organizations take instructions from western nations, an issue which compromises the stability and security of African nations.

**THREATS TO DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA**

The most prominent threat currently bedeviling the African continent has been the retention of former dictators mostly within the borders of the African continent, with some holding on to influential public positions. Information at hand has shown that out of a myriad of past and present dictators on the continent, only Charles Taylor has been taken before the courts of law to answer charges against human rights violations in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The impunity with which dictators (past and present) have regard themselves and are regarded by fellow incumbent political leaders on the continent leaves a lot to be desired. The continent does not seem to want to put on record (through its actions) that ex-dictators should be asked to account for their actions during their tenure of office. This sense of brotherhood that exists among various African leaders has weakened African democratic institutions. This has made Africa notorious for being a retirement home for most of its former dictator leaders or for providing a safe haven for such dictators, with research indicating that "…Africa is the most popular haven for ex-tyrants, probably because it produced so many former leaders falling into [the] category of playing host to many former strongmen" (Makuni, 2008). When it comes to ousted despots, Africa does a good job of looking after its own. In Africa alone, six cities are known to have welcomed discredited leaders in the recent past or to be still home to strongmen who have fled their countries. Most recently, Nigeria provided a safe haven for former warlord, Charles Taylor of Liberia, who is currently undergoing trial for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, having been extradited from Nigeria where he had lived in exile for 3 years. Rabat in Morocco similarly welcomed former Zairean strongman Mobutu Sese Seko in May 1997, after Laurent Kabila's troops had entered Kinshasa, forcing Mobutu to go into exile in Morocco, where he eventually died and buried. Harare in Zimbabwe has been home to former dictator and convicted perpetrator of genocide and crime against humanity, Mengistu Haile Mariam of Ethiopia. Political parties in Zimbabwe has expressed the view that "Zimbabwe should not be a safe haven or resting place for serial human rights violators like Mr Mengistu; we can't shelter purveyors of injustice"(Fletcher, 2009). Belgian judicial system, whose courts have universal jurisdiction to try human rights abusers failed to have former Chadian dictator, Hissene Habre extradited to face trial. Hissene Habre was overthrown in 1990 and stand accused of human rights abuses, torture and mass killings after the host country refused to have him extradited to Belgium for trial, thanks to the embrace of the Senegalese capital, Dakar. For the notorious Idi Amin, it is not clear whether no African country

would have had him, but the former 'Butcher of Kampala' fled to Jeda in Saudi Arabia after he was ousted in 1979 and eventually died and is buried there.

In addition to shielding its own ruthless former rulers, Africa has also developed a habit of opening its arms to ousted authoritarians from other lands. The Shah of Iran, who was ousted by Shiite leader Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, went into exile in Egypt where he died in 1980. The abortive power-sharing arrangement in Hawaii led to an armed revolt and subsequent oust of Jean-Bertrand Aristide who had ruled his country with an increasingly tyrannical hand. After a concerted diplomatic offensive by former US Secretary of State Colin Powell, ex-President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki agreed to grant Aristide and his family asylum and subsequently a job offer with UNISA where he and his wife are both engaged as researchers. UNISA has since incurred the wrath of academics who have accused the university authorities of turning the institution into "a dumping ground for ex-presidents" (Makuni, 2008).

The retention of authoritarian or inefficient (or both) ex-Presidents has become a trend in many African states, which in itself has also impacted negatively on the democratization of the continent. The intended or continued retention of Aristide of Haiti or Mbeki of South Africa within academic circles raises questions of what impact their continued influence on public institutions would have, and what perception of democracy they will have on the new generation of African citizens and prospective leaders. The fact that these very ex-Presidents were rejected by their own people after it was realized that their style of governance was increasingly alienating them from their constituencies.

While some people may entertain the notion of demoting the above ex-presidents to the dustbin of history, there are those who feel that these people still has a role to play in the political, economic and social development of Africa. The emerging young generation of leaders would learn many lessons from their predecessors, especially through mistakes made by these yesteryear servicemen. Therefore it is imperative that the legacy left behind by these political leaders be improved upon and be bequeathed to the young generation of leaders through academic institutions like the one Mbeki, a renowned intellectual, has envisaged. While it can be acknowledged that most of the deposed African leaders had committed evil deeds of misrule and gross human rights violations within their countries, but not all that they have done during their tenure of office could be looked at in bad light. There were some things

which they did well and from which current and prospective African leaders could take a cue. Given the humiliating departure of the former President of South Africa due to a vote of no confidence in his leadership style and his "quiet diplomacy" on the Zimbabwean issue, it is clear that his own people lost confidence in his leadership. One stands to wonder what new leadership skills he is going to impart to the youth. Therefore the prospects of Mbeki's *African Leadership Initiative* lay in limbo given that he, as the founder, failed the people of South Africa on leadership. However, allowing him to open such a school to impart leadership skills to future leaders would not only be an insult to the people of South Africa or Zimbabwe (where he failed to resolve the political impasse after more than 4 years of 'negotiations'), but a threat and insult to the African democratization project, especially given that the Leadership School is going to be instituted under the auspices of the University of South Africa (UNISA), one of the oldest distance education tertiary institutions in Africa and the world.

## CONCLUSION

Efforts displayed by the majority of African countries to build, restore or institute democratic structures within their constituencies have leave a lot to be desired. The attainment, promotion and restoration of democracy stand as an abyss, given the high levels of poverty and illiteracy rates among many African grassroots people have disempowered and disabled them. Civil society efforts to contribute to the democratization process on the African continent have encountered a plethora of challenges, most of which are inevitable unless African government create a conducive and enabling environment within which civil society can operate, in addition to availing appropriate and adequate human and financial resources to make civil society organizations viable. Diminishing participatory spaces, high poverty levels on the African continent as well the continued erosion of democratic institutions have all contributed to making democratization in Africa a remote dream.

Over-dependency on foreign funding by civil society organizations in Africa have had a restrictive effect on their ability to participate in campaigning for the restoration of democracy, as well as their internal decision-making processes which have equally been influenced by the foreign donors. Suspicion has reigned as the ruling elite have accused civic organizations of taking instructions from foreign donors and being used s conduits for channeling funds for destabilization purposes, a development that has further sowed sees of mistrust between many African states and their respective civil society organizations. Despite being accused of over-dependency on foreign donor funding and subsequently

losing focus on their objectives, the civil society movement has played a crucial role in the democratization of most of African and Latin American countries. The mobilization strategies employed by various civil society organizations have attracted the attention of government and in most cases, attracting discussion with the establishment. It is from the impact that civil society has left on the democratization processes; especially the transformation form colonial rule to post-colonial dispensation that one would conclude that despite the inherent weaknesses of civil society, its crucial role in the democratization project outweighs the weaknesses. Proponents of the civil society movement argue that has it not been for the involvement of civil society in the fight for civil liberties and de-colonization, most of Africa would be in the throngs of colonial rule, or unrepentant dictatorships.

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