

Examining Civil Society Organisations and Zambia's Governance System: Challenges, Successes and Opportunities

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Abstract- Although civil society organisations (CSOs) are crucial in promoting efficient and effective good governance and maintaining democratic ideals, their role in political, social and economic development of any country seem to be problematic. This study sought to examine civil society organisation's positionality in Zambia's Governance System, with a specific focus on Southern African Centre for Constructive Resolution of Disputes (SACCORD) and Foundation for Democratic Process (FODEP)'s political participation. The study consisted of 32 participants. A qualitative approach was utilised and a case study design was followed. In depth interviews and questionnaires were used to collect data from CSO staff, government officials and the general public. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the collected data. The study established that CSOs focus on different areas and play an important role in the Zambian governance system. The study also found that civil society organisations sometimes work with the government in the promotion of good governance by offering checks and balances and prompting transparency. The study also identified different strategies CSOs use in the promotion of good governance, these include advocacy as well as sensitization. The study also found that there are a number of challenges faced by CSOs in Zambia in pursuing their duties, among them are: poor funding and lack of financial resources which was an impediment to the effective service provision of CSOs and the bad perception by the government which describes the current state of CSOs as inadequate and weak. The main conclusion of this study is that due to many CSOs' over-dependence on foreign donor funding they have become weak over the years. This weakness simply means that CSOs organisations do not

perform their duties; as a result, good governance may be difficult to achieve.

Indexed Terms- Governance, Positionality, Civil society Organisations. Political, participation

I. INTRODUCTION

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play an increasingly important role in governance in many third world countries [1]. Functioning from spaces between the family, the state and the private sector. These organisations have the aim to promote good governance and contribute to better transparency and accountability, in many of these countries. Additionally, CSOs have become important actors in the delivery of social services and the implementation of other national development programs to complement what the states sometimes fail to provide to their citizens and advocates for good governance. For example, CSOs provide checks and balances on public affairs which other state actors are not mandated to do [2].

In Zambia, CSOs act at a local and national level. They are a mouthpiece that provides information and services to the population, public authorities and even businesses. Just like in other countries, they play a key role in the fulfilment of social, cultural and welfare services, be it as a separate self-financed organization or in cooperation with national governments and local public authorities. They are involved in public missions and public services which are facing challenges of lack of civil society participation and monopolization of decision making. The development of CSOs and their relationship to the state on governance issues has reflected the

prevailing socio-economic and political environment [3].

While some CSOs are doing notable work in the area of advocating for the rights of vulnerable groups, especially women and children, other CSOs deal with good governance and poverty reduction strategies [4, 23]. For instance, in Zambia, political parties and a number of other CSOs have been providing opposition to the ruling political party that has wielded the reins of power since independence in 1964. Close to the times of general elections, which are held once after every five years, several CSOs get involved in raising voters' awareness on election matters, and during elections, they help in the monitoring of the electoral processes [5]. The economic reform programs have also been an area of interest of CSOs, some of which have been actively involved in ensuring that the benefits of economic reforms reach people at the grassroots level, through such initiatives as public expenditure tracking [6]. In Zambia, FODEP and SACCORD are some of the long serving CSOs that have been operating since 1992 and 1999 respectively. These two organisations are key and ideal for this study due to their long standing services in the governance process of Zambia.

The purpose of this study is to Explore Civil society organisations Positionality in Zambia's governance system through the lenses of political participation. The first section shows the theoretical issues that surround the topic in the form of a literature review. Then part two of this paper gives the methods that were utilised. The third section provides findings and fourth part is a discussion of the results section. The fifth and final section gives the study's main proposition and conclusion.

II. FRAMING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS AND THEIR MANDATE THROUGH THEORETICAL LENSES

This study was premised on the theory of neo-liberalization by Friedrich Hayek which was founded in 1938. Neo-liberalism gave rise to the concept of civil society as one of the pillars in development and the promotion of good governance. Central to this

theory is the abolition of government intervention in economic affairs. It is based on the principle of a free market system. Neo-liberalism has been defined as a theory of economic practices that proposes that human wellbeing can be advanced by liberating the individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within the institutional framework characterized by strong property rights, free markets and trade [7].

One of the most common features of neo-liberalism is its emphasis on the role of the market and minimizing the interventionist role of the state. For the neoliberals, the market is the optimal space for the production and distribution of wealth and as the optimal vehicle for social mobility [8]. The neoliberal ideology requires the replacement of interventionist state by a non-interventionist state and encourages the expansion of market forces by undertaking various market friendly policies. Policies such as deregulation and privatisation are encouraged. There is also belief in the principle of comparative advantage of free trade whilst opposing protectionist policies and the tying of economic growth to export expansion [9]. All these facets are achieved through economic deregulation, elimination of tariffs and a range of monetary and social policies favourable to business. Thus, neo-liberalism can be seen as a development model that is a very comprehensive development strategy with economic, social and political implications.

The current interest in civil society came particularly as a result of a persistent push for growth for the formal sector to achieve a liberal economy. Although the role of civil society was not clearly articulated or emphasised in the initial packages of good governance, it was later endorsed in the reconceptualised definitions of the concept. Liberal democratic theory argues for civil society as a sure recipe for democracy and development. Development practitioners have come to the realisation that it is not just state institutions that essentially ensure a high standard of democratic governance but also that the civil society and NGOs do play a big role to play [10]. In the present era of globalisation, the state and market economy is essentially important whilst the civil society is equally important in advocating for the state to promote national interests.

The perceived failures of state-led development approaches of the 1970s and 1980s fueled an interest in Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the civil society as a development alternative, offering innovative and people centred approaches to service delivery, advocacy and empowerment. Their emergence has centred on their ability to offer a 'development alternative' and therefore seen to be making a lot of claims about more effective approaches necessary for addressing poverty and challenging unequal relationships thus justifying their role in filling the gaps caused by inefficient state provision of services [11]. Their strength is seen in enabling them to design services and programs using innovative and experimental approaches centred on community participation and that through their programs, they empower disadvantaged groups and help them to gain a voice in the governance space from which they have for a long time been excluded. Thus, the NGOs and civil society are no longer minor actors on the development stage as in some cases they receive more funding than the government. The period from the late 1970s to the early 1990s witnessed a major upsurge in neoliberal ideals in the contest of the development process and development strategies [12]. This neoliberal revolution presented a major assault on natural developmentalism in the context of which the state had played an active role in the process.

The ideological ascendancy of neo-liberalism at this time was accompanied by the rise of structural adjustment in aid policies, reductions in public expenditure and the withdrawal of state provided services. This radical reform led to the state being replaced by the market at the centre of development strategies and poverty lost its position as an explicit concern. The continued donor distrust and frustrations with states generated and fuelled interest in NGOs and civil society as desirable alternatives, viewing them favourably for their representation of beneficiaries and their role as innovators of new technologies and ways of working with the poor [13].

III. METHOD

The study employed a case study design, in which a qualitative research approach was used. A case study was used because it allowed for the researcher to get

information on CSOs Positionality in the governance system in Zambia at comparably lower costs and time because it focused on a particular phenomenon (Positionality). A case study was chosen as a design for this study because it enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth information about CSOs Positionality in the governance system in Zambia [14]. It allowed researchers to explore the key characteristics, meanings and implications of the case which in this case is the CSOs participation in government programmes.

The target population of this study was people who are directly involved members of the general public, political party leaders, CSO members and officials from the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Local Government. This population was targeted because it has sufficient knowledge on CSOs and the laws and rules that govern their operation.

In this study, the sample size was 32. The sample comprised of six staff from FODEP and another six members of the staff from the SACCORD. The sample also included eight leaders of political parties and 12 members of the general public. These participants were chosen for the study because they were the prime constitutive in promoting good governance grounded on the political participation and type of governance systems they echo. The principle of saturation was used to arrive at the sample size. This principle states that when information from participants keeps on repeating itself, the researcher should not keep on selecting more participants because the same information will be obtained.

The inclusion criteria in this study was if a participant was from the general public and a political party learner and member, he or she qualified to be part of the sample. Not only that but also, any official in the ministry of justice, SACCORD, FODEP and local government qualified to be part of the sample. The exclusion criteria were that all members of the general public who were not political leaders and members of the party were not included in the sample. Non-officials from the ministry of justice, SACCORD, FODEP and the Ministry of local government were also not included in the sample.

The research employed non-probability sampling methods. In this method, purposive sampling was employed where the researcher decisively selected the sample considered important for the research. Purposive sampling was used in selecting all participants needed for the study. Purposive sampling technique was used because it helps the researcher to select rare participants and the ones who are the only ones to give the required information about the study.

Data was collected using open-ended questionnaires which were administered to political party members and in-depth interview were used on government officials and CSO representatives. Open-ended questionnaires were employed to collect data because they allow participants to respond to the questions and their own time and they allow participants to give detailed information on a given question which is one of the demands for the qualitative study. Interview guides were used for data collection because they allow a researcher to have a physical interaction with the participants which may allow a researcher to probe further when need arises.

Data was analysed following a thematic approach. This technique of treating data was selected because it is a custom-built and iterative process. The process of analysis involved distinct stages of preparing and organising, reducing the data into themes through coding and condensing codes and finally representing the data as figures, tables or discussion. It should be noted that data processing began during fieldwork or data collection.

Participants in this research were protected from any kind of harm or loss of dignity. Permission and clearance was sought from all relevant authorities (school managers, medical administrators and heads of departments from the University of Zambia) before proceeding to data collection.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Significance of CSO in governance systems of Zambia

When participants were asked to give their opinion on whether CSOs such as SACCORD and FODEP are influential and are playing a significant role in Zambia's governance system, respondents reported

that civil society organisations specifically SACCORD and FODEP are influential and are playing a significant role in the promotion of good governance in Zambia. One participant (P2) commented:

“CSOs contribute to the respect for maintenance of democracy, strengthening of good governance, growth and levelling of the electoral arena and advocating for reformation of different pieces of legislation that govern the conduct of elections in Zambia.”

However, some participants stated that civil society organisations were neither weak nor strong and that lack of civil society participation in policy processes decreases efficiency and that affects social- economic growth in the society. Further, other participants were of the view that civil society organisations do not fully participate in the operation of the government of the day. This is the reason as to why governments can do whatever they want to do. For example, Participant SS01 (Male) the following;

CSOs do not play major roles in the governance system. As a result, there is less transparency and accountability. There is less commitment to political participation and good governance around the world by these CSOs.

When participants were further asked to give their opinions on meaning and description of good governance, they reported that it is the incorporation of the elements of participation, transparency, decision-making, accountability, rule of law. And that Zambia as a country has not yet attained good governance but is getting there. As can be noted in P5 (female)'s comment below:

“Good governance implies an efficient and predictable public sector incorporating participation and the rule of law and as a country, I think we are not all the way there, but I think we have made good progress in terms of trying to promote good governance in the country. Good governance is basically based on the premises of trying to get to the principles of constitutionalism and rule of law,

B. Areas of focus for SACCORD and FODEP

This study found that CSOs such as SACCORD and FODEP have areas of focus and objectives of their organisations. Participants who represented these two main CSOs in governance issues reported that in Zambia they have been in existence or presence of oversight organisations since the 1990's. The reasons for establishment of these CSOs included: to participate responsibly in the formulation, advocacy, implementation and monitoring of governance reform processes. These among others remain their areas of focus in governance matters.

P5 amplified this finding by making the following remarks:

FODEP was established during the elections when MMD bounced into power, it was previously called ZEMIC when all the churches, Unions and other individuals came together to monitor the election. After that mandate was done away with, the organisation still continued and formed a Foundation called FODEP in 1992. Some of the areas we focus on as an organisation, the first one, is to promote the rights of the citizens, that every citizen feels they are welcome in their own country and their rights are respected and the other thing is we monitor elections and conduct civil education to the Zambians as well as outside the country.

Generally, participants talked about achieving organisational objectives through several approaches. Most prominent strategies that are most successful in the implementation process included awareness workshops and holding leaders accountable. They also make use of long-term strategic plans such as formulating five-year strategic plans. In with this finding, P1 stated that;

Some of the strategies that we are using are capacity building, awareness raising or sensitization, advocacy, networking, creating signage, civic participation and also civic engagement. These are some of the mechanisms we use.

The participants were further asked to rate the success of Civil society organisations like SACCORD and FODEP in promoting social change,

political participation and good governance. Interesting responses were given. For example, they said that generally they are doing well and they are succeeding in everyday activities and their goals and objectives are being achieved. P6 had this to say;

I think say out of 100 we could be above 75% but this hasn't been done on our own, in terms of the issues that we gather from our monitoring work we work other CSOs we compile our report and make recommendation and we have seen some changes in the electoral legal framework for example enshrining of the date of election in the constitution came out of our advocacy with other CSOs.

When the general public was asked about giving their opinion on whether CSOs participation country wide in the government policy is effective, they clearly reported that CSOs participation in government policy formulation is very effective. For instance, CSOs have been strong partners of the government in coming up with the 8th national development plan in Zambia.

P11 stated on record that:

We are talking about the 8th development national plan which will be succeeding the 7th national development plan. There has been extensive CSO participation in formulation of the plan and consultation in the formulation of those plans; these are national plans that seem to benefit the people of the republic of Zambia generally around the country.

When the participants at FODEP were asked about areas of focus, they gave a range of areas of focus which included. Advocating for good governance, Voter education, election monitoring, conduct of intra-party activities, inclusion of youth and women in position, respect of rule of law, Public giving accurate information, Constitutional reform and Ensure that laws are followed. They believe that these activities will contribute to good governance.

P6 had this to say:

We focus on different areas and some of them are; Advocating for good governance, Voter education, Election monitoring, conduct of intra-party activities, Inclusion of youth and women in position, Respect of rule of law, Public giving accurate information,

Constitutional reform and Ensure that laws are followed.

SACCORD representatives when asked about what they focus on as organisations, they said that they focus on promoting human rights, democratic governance and promoting peace in Zambia and southern region of Africa. These responsibilities give them a chance to contribute effectively to the government operations.

When government officials from the Ministry of Justice were asked about areas of focus by civil society organisations, it was noted that they mostly focus on human rights advocacy, community awareness campaigns- even in health related issues [13], prudent management of public finance and several others.

C. The strategies used by SACCORD and FODEP in promoting good governance in society.

There are various ways through which CSOs influence governance in society. These study participants reported that strategies are mainly situational in the promotion of good governance, they outlined a number of strategies.

For instance, P3 commented the following:

In line with our objectives as an organisation, we ensure that we promote good governance through advocacy. We advocate for all governments and political parties to support promoting a good governance system in Zambia. We feel this is the only way government can be held accountable for their activities.

When participants from SACCORD were asked about the strategies they use in achieving their objectives, they reported that they use different types of the strategies such as fostering dialogue between SACCORD and the government of the day. They also use media such as prints, radio or TV and several others. One of the participants (P4) said this:

We use Dialogue between SACCORD and the government, through media statements such as prints, radio or TV , by training communities about good governance, strategic

plans of five terms plans, It engages human stakeholders and through advocacy.

D. Challenges faced by SACCORD and FODEP's in political participation and good governance

With regards to challenges, Participants from FODEP were also asked about challenges they face in executing their roles as civil society organisations. A variety of responses were given. Among them are civic space has been tied up, You are looked at as a member of a political party, Money challenges if donors are not funding, volunteering is the challenge in rural districts, COVID-19 challenges and because rural people may not know digital ways of communication.

When participants from SACCORD were asked about the challenges they face in participating in a good governance system, donor funding is a challenge as of now. There are not enough resources that we can use to conduct some activities because donors have not been good in terms of funding in the recent past years.

With regards to successes, participants from FODEP were asked about the Successes they have made since its inception in Zambia, they said that they have contributed to Growth of democracy in Zambia. They said they have made massive progress in their duties which includes networking with other society organisations, conducting research on democracy and conflict management through dialogue. Speaking on the mandate of CSOs,P6 remarked:

We have been members of civil society network, we have reliable enough law reform, Presidential appointments, and research documents on democracy in Zambia and we have also been involved in political conflict resolution and Conduct elections for different institution and Member young people in political leadership, reach people through community, Sensitise in the bus, bus stations, and markets.

The findings from government officials on the challenges CSOs face, indicated that most CSOs experience poor funding from the donors. This contributed to poor participation in governance issues. The participant also reported that when CSOs

are inactive, the government does not operate to the best of its ability because there is no one observing what they are doing.

Government officials also indicated that previously the relationship was good between government and CSOs, but now the relation is not good. There is mistrust between the government and CSOs.

Participant 1 had this to say:

As a Ministry of justice, we have seen that there is poor relation between civil society organisations and the government. The government looks at these CSOs as political opponents if they oppose us. We sometimes think they are being used by other political parties to discredit the government of the day.

E. Measures to the problems faced by CSOs in the political participation and good governance in Zambia.

Participants were also asked about the measures that can be put in place to solve the challenges faced in executing their duties as CSOs. They reported that there is a need to use social media to send information to the masses. This is because in times of crisis, it is difficult to communicate with the communities. The need to be seen in as good governance players was made clear by P5 who mentioned the following:

We need to Work with other CSOs to achieve one thing. When working as a team, the voice is amplified. There is a need to have the rule of law in the country. The CSOs should not be mistreated or viewed as opposition political parties. As for me, CSOs should not be labelled as regime changers but cooperating partners in development of the country. There is also a need to strengthen civic education to the Zambian people about good governance. We also need to teach young people about patriotism.

When participants from SACCORD were asked about measures to be put in place to manage the challenges, they reported that developments of policies that allow or protect the civil society organisation are needed to be established. In the next section, the findings presented above are discussed.

V. DISCUSSION

Results on areas of focus by SACCORD and FODEP clearly indicates that they focus on participating responsibly in the formulation, advocacy, Implementation and monitoring of governance reform processes. These among others remain their areas of focus in governance. It can be contended here that civil society organisations focus on different issues in the country which include policy formulation, monitoring of government programmes and many others, this finding is similar to that of Habasonde [15].

On ensuring organisational objectives are achieved and listing of approaches or mechanisms that are most successful, it was clearly indicated that CSOs conduct workshops with elected leaders for them to know what their duties are supposed to be, how responsible they should be as well as accountable to the people that elect them. This finding is contrary to that of Borg and Gall [16] who found that the approach that is used is through the utilisation of long-term strategic plans we formulate five-year strategic plans and, in those plans,, we devise problematic areas that seek to promote peace and democracy and they train volunteers. On the part of the success of Civil society organisations like SACCORD and FODEP in promoting social change, political participations and good governance the response was that the organisation was successful up to 75%.

CSOs have been rated quite highly in terms of promoting social change in Zambia, and of course this is the case when you look at our engagements and some of the things that they have brought about in terms of success stories. For example, through engagement in governance we have contributed immensely in terms of governance reforms where the constitution making process is concerned. One of the biggest conflicts in our country has been the constitution. one of the biggest challenges that Zambia faced for a very long time was the issue of our seating head of states dying in office and us having to spend large amounts of money ahead of by-elections through SACCORD submissions and other stakeholders we were able to see an amended constitution number 2 of 2016 passed into law.

Similarly, Lester and Milbrath [17] show that CSOs play a very important role in Zambian society by fostering good governance principles at various levels.

Results from the general public on whether CSOs participation country wide in the government policy is effective were that participation of CSOs was very effective. This is in line with a UNDP report [18] which reinstates that there has been extensive CSO participation in formulation of the plan and consultation in the formulation of those plans; these are national plans that seem to benefit the people of the republic of Zambia generally around the country.

With regards to strategies CSOs use to promote good governance, a number of mechanisms were outlined which included promoting good governance through advocacy. Not only that but also advocating for all governments and political parties to support promoting a good governance system in Zambia. This finding is with what Diamond [19] who also found that most CSOs promote governance through advocacy. The other mechanism from the findings was that they conduct Sensitisation in the bus, bus stations, and markets. They also have Actual participation in voting. They also engage political parties to avoid violence. They also Work with police and we Work with the electoral commission of Zambia to ensure that there is a smooth electoral process in Zambia which contradicts the work of Lester and Milbrath [17] which highlights that CSOs use traditional ways of conducting their activities. They also use dialogue between SACCORD and the government. Through media statements such as prints, radio or TV, by training communities about good governance, strategic plans of five terms, it engages human stakeholders and through advocacy.

The results relate well with what the theory of neo-liberalism states. This theory states that civil society organisations play an important role in promoting good governance. Where there is good governance, there is a free market which improves the economy of any nation.

On the part of the challenges, it discovered they faced tied up in terms of civic space. Most of the CSOs are

looked at as members of political parties. It was also noted that money was the challenge because the donors are not funding because many CSOs have risen up. Covid 19 has also been a challenge because it lowered down the communication. This finding is similar to Maitra [20].

Establishment of measures by these two organisations to the problems faced by CSOs in the political participation and good governance in Zambia was reported by some participants. Participants were also asked about the measures that can be put in place to solve the challenges faced in executing their duties as CSOs. They reported that there is a need to use social media to send information to the masses. This is because in times of crisis, it is difficult to communicate with the communities. They need to work with other CSOs to achieve one thing. When working as a team, the voice is amplified. There is a need to have the rule of law in the country. The CSOs should not be mistreated or viewed as opposition political parties as also argued by Mulubale [21].

It was also noted that civil society organisations need to be protected because in most cases they are being harassed by the political cadres because they are viewed as political parties or belonging to a particular political party. Similar to the findings by Denzin [22]. From the foregoing discussion it is clear that CSOs such as FODEP and SACCROD experience abuse from political parties in power due to their negative perception.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown that CSOs have various areas of focus in the governance paradigm of a country such as Zambia. From the findings we can see that key issues that CSOs work are around voter education, human right advocacy, policy formulation and constitutional amendments. These areas are regarded as key to the participation of CSOs in promoting good governance. Other main finding the strategies used by CSOs to achieve their objectives. It has been established here that CSOs use advocacy and actual participation in actual governance issues. For example, participation in constitutional reforms. On the part of advocacy, participants clearly

indicated community advocacy to educate the masses about their role and the role of the CSOs in promoting good governance in Zambia. The study has also highlighted that CSOs face a number of challenges in the quest to execute their duties. One of the problems is donor funding. Most CSOs operate under the help of the donors. This simply means that once the donors back down, they stop operating or their normal operations are affected. For example, reaching remote areas for sensitization becomes a challenge because there is a logistical challenge. Not only that but also, there is abuse of civil society organisation by political cadres as they see CSOs as institutions that are formed to remove them from power. They ensure that any voice made by the CSOs which dispute their (political cadres) wrongdoing is turned down and proceed with what they think is right.

The study has also established measures to the challenges faced by CSOs from participant's point of view which included; coming up with laws which protect activities conducted by CSOs. For example, there must be laws that prohibit political cadres from disturbing the normal operations of CSOs in Zambia. It was also found out that in terms of coming up with measures, there is a need to sensitise the communities about the roles of CSOs in Zambia. Therefore, conducting a massive sensitization programme would help the Zambian communities to know and understand their roles and those of CSOs in Zambia.

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