UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE   www.usip.org

SPECIAL REPORT

Maria J. Stephan, Sadaf Lakhani, and Nadia Naviwala

Aid to Civil Society
A Movement Mindset

Special Report 361   February 2015

Contents

Summary

- Civic campaigns and movements are key drivers of social and political development but receive inadequate attention and support from development actors.
- External support for diffuse, decentralized, and often leaderless movements that engage in nonviolent direct action, however, is neither straightforward nor uncontroversial. It differs from support for traditional NGOs.
- Traditional NGOs are especially effective as brokers to provide information, raise awareness of rights, and push to widen democratic space within which civic campaigns and movements can emerge.
- Supporting movements requires shifts in the way donors understand and engage civil society, creative new approaches to supporting nontraditional actors, and a willingness to take calculated financial and political risk.
- A movement mindset would stress agile funding mechanisms, nonmonetary support, and development of convening spaces in which to bring movements, NGOs, and governments into contact with each other. Regional hubs for civil society currently being developed by USAID, Sida, and other donors could help advance these goals.

Introduction

Vibrant civil societies are widely considered to be both bedrocks of successful development and buffers against the kind of predatory governance that so often breeds violence. Worldwide, organized citizen movements have successfully confronted government repression and discrimination, challenged discriminatory development practices, and pressed governments unwilling or unable to provide security, basic services, and livelihood activities. In India, Afghanistan, Turkey, Kenya, and elsewhere, civic movements have successfully challenged acute corruption, one of the most significant drivers of violent conflict and stumbling blocks to economic and political development.

Most recently, what we refer to colloquially as *people power* has captured the global imagination demonstrated by popular challenges to authoritarian rule in the Middle East

and North Africa, the ouster of a corrupt leader in Ukraine, and colorful protests challenging government policies in Venezuela, Brazil, and Hong Kong. The importance and widespread nature of nonviolent campaigns and movements globally, and their role in both empowering citizens and confronting obstacles to effective political and economic development, raises the question of whether and how such campaigns can be effectively supported.

The challenge is not insignificant. Supporting civic movements that are fluid, diverse, decentralized, and often loosely organized is tricky. Aiding civil society actors whose structures and processes are unfamiliar to donors and might involve confrontational campaign tactics is difficult. The challenges are more acute when citizens are organized to challenge the practices of governments that are allies of major foreign aid providers or when movements press for aims that are inherently antidemocratic or antithetical to human rights norms.

Such difficulties are exacerbated by negative global trends affecting civil society. Crackdowns on civil society and restrictions on foreign support for democracy and human rights groups, which began in earnest in the last decade, are mounting around the world as governments impose draconian constraints on civic organizations and criminalize dissent and as suspicion of Western-funded organizations grows.[1]

Few have attempted to critically examine the effectiveness of foreign assistance tied to goals of social and political transformation—democratic development, human rights, accountability, and most recently countering violent extremism. One question that emerges from this new context is how foreign aid can most effectively be used to support civic campaigns and movements whose goals align with international norms.

This is not to suggest that foreign aid to traditional nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations (CSOs) is without merit. Traditional CSOs are often key conduits between donors and more fluid movements. They also provide members with skills, resources, and convening spaces that are important for capacity building. Locally driven social and political movements are necessary for the type of democratic progress that the international community aims to support. Supporting nontraditional civil society actors, however, is neither easy nor without controversy. Doing so effectively requires fresh thinking and innovative approaches.

Civic Movements Compared With NGOs

Civic movements are distinct from the NGOs that donor agencies often partner with, though both fall under the umbrella concept of civil society. Collective citizen mobilization—social movements—comprises a wide range of entities with certain common characteristics. They use collective or joint action. They have change-oriented goals. Their methods are extra-institutional and may involve confrontation with power-holders, that is, they open up new democratic spaces. They have some degree of organization. They have some degree of continuity over time, even if their specific goals, leaderships, and collective action methods change.[2] As one noted social movement expert noted,

> Social movements are neither fixed nor narrowly bounded in space, time, or membership. Instead, they are made up of shifting clusters of organizations, networks, communities, and activist individuals, connected by participation in challenges and collective identities through which participants define the boundaries and significance of their groups.[3]

NGOs, by contrast, are typically more established organizations, often registered with the government making it easier for donor agencies to partner with them. To satisfy donor concerns about corruption and misuse of funds, recipients must be able to demonstrate high

capacity with respect to accounting and reporting. When such capacity is lacking, donors invest in teaching these skills as well as how to pursue further funding in order to sustain the budgets needed to maintain a professional presence—offices, staff, utility bills, computers, and cars.

In practice, the full range of civil society is much broader and more diverse than the donors typically encounter. Community groups, labor and trade unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, youth and women's groups, professional associations, artist collectives, and foundations—in addition to NGOs—are often key drivers of successful campaigns and movements for social and political change. But each actor most often plays a distinct role, representing and mobilizing a particular constituency.

Grassroots as a Driver of Change

Historically, citizens' movements have brought global attention to national or localized struggles just as they have been critical to achieving political and social gains for minority or marginalized groups. The popular struggles against communist dictatorships in Eastern Europe during the 1980s, the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, and the U.S. civil rights movement are classic examples.[4] Less well-known, the Chipko movement of the 1970s in India not only changed India's policy on forestry in the Himalayas but also drew global attention to the link between environmental sustainability and development aims.

Similarly, indigenous peoples' movements in Latin America, though focused on claiming rights for their communities, also helped shed light on the weaknesses in the single, unnegotiated concept of development driven by Western nations.[5] Corruption has been a galvanizing issue for many civic campaigns and movements. A popular movement in Brazil, mobilized in the context of World Cup preparations, forced the ruling party to accede to public demand for better services.[6] Other civic efforts against corruption—including the Citizen's Campaign for Constant Light in Turkey, the social audit campaign focused on parliamentary funds in Kenya, and the Fifth Pillar bribe rejection campaign in India—have been especially dynamic and vibrant. Success has involved mass refusals to pay bribes, prosecutions of corrupt officials, bolstering an anticorruption commission, ending fraud-ridden development practices, and getting citizenries actively involved in governance.[7]

On the other hand, grassroots movements can mobilize for objectionable causes as well. The Rwandan genocide, ethnic cleansing campaigns in the Balkans, and the Holocaust were also the outcomes of successful social movements, albeit for violent, ethnocentric interests. The regime-backed Nashi youth movement in Russia uses a combination of violent and nonviolent methods to harass those who challenge the government. Antigay protests in Uganda have mobilized thousands. The Arab Spring taught us that mass popular movements do not necessarily lead—at least not in the short term—to the consolidation of democracy. The immediate result of successful citizen campaigns can look like increased instability as previously united fronts splinter, fissures are revealed, and new groups emerge and compete to fill the vacuum that has been left behind.

The relationship between popular movements and democratic development nevertheless has strong empirical grounding. Data indicate that nonviolent movements are far more effective than those that use violence, even against the most formidable opponents. A 2011 study of 323 violent and nonviolent campaigns found that nonviolent campaigns using a broad range of tactics were twice as successful at removing nondemocratic regimes and foreign occupiers.[8] Nonviolent movements are able to attract a much larger and more diverse participant base in any given society, contributing to their power and effectiveness. The same study found that nonviolent campaigns correlate with significantly greater democratic consolidation and civil

A 2011 study of 323 violent and nonviolent campaigns found that nonviolent campaigns using a broad range of tactics were twice as successful at removing nondemocratic regimes and foreign occupiers.

peace than violent struggles do.[9] This finding supported the conclusion of a 2005 Freedom House study that transitions generated by nonviolent civic coalitions lead to far better results for freedom than top-down transitions initiated by elites.[10] Reformist movements, like those targeting corruption, have often expanded and escalated when governments proved intransigent or used mass violence in response.

Yet elites and governments are often important allies in reform and challenging the abuse of power. In especially repressive or restrictive contexts, it is sometimes reformers within the government who can provide openings for citizen demands to be heard. Some of the most effective anticorruption campaigns, including the Ficha Limpa campaign in Brazil, the Fifth Pillar campaign in India, and the citizen's campaign for cleaner elections in South Korea have combined direct engagement with government officials with extra-institutional tactics that include consumer boycotts, candidate blacklists, and labor strikes.[11]

Traditional Model, New Challenges

The potential for organized civil society to transform social and political realities is not lost on policymakers. Funding for civil society from government, private citizens, and corporate budgets has been steadily rising.[12] The idea of increased and more effective support for civil society has become a trending theme of high-level discussions and policy statements. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) noted the importance of alignment with nonstate national actors and a statebuilding approach that includes civil society.[13] The World Bank, similarly, recently highlighted the importance of citizen engagement in shaping development policies and in ensuring the quality of services delivered in projects. It has also placed even greater focus on how organized civil societies can strengthen government accountability in fragile and conflict-affected states and those with restrictive political systems.[14]

In 2014, President Obama issued a presidential memorandum directing agencies abroad to take additional steps to engage civil societies.[15] The memo summarized prevalent views about the promise of strengthened civil societies:

> Civil society organizations—such as community groups, nongovernmental organizations, labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations—often drive innovations and develop new ideas and approaches to solve social, economic, and political problems that governments can apply on a larger scale. Moreover, by giving people peaceful avenues to advance their interests and express their convictions, a free and flourishing civil society contributes to stability and helps to counter violent extremism.

In practice, the term NGO has been treated as synonymous with civil society. Until recently, OECD-DAC used the term to gather data on civil society but has dropped it in favor of CSO in an attempt to better capture the diversity of civil society beyond NGOs. Still, it acknowledges that even the term CSO falls short.

> Civil society comprises more than the sum total of formally constituted nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) or CSOs. It includes a wider range of informal organizations, networks, and citizens' groups from traditional forms of civic association such as faith-based organizations and village heads to the emergence of new civic groups and actors as illustrated by the "Arab Spring".[16]

What currently constitutes civil society support by donors is, by and large, targeted assistance to a narrow group of entities within the broad rubric of organized civil society.

The World Bank recently highlighted the importance of citizen engagement in shaping development policies and in ensuring the quality of services delivered in projects.

The vast majority of such assistance goes to professional, and often registered, NGOs. Despite the groundwork and brokering role they can play in raising awareness of rights and in providing information to the public, however, NGOs are often not the most salient actors in mobilizing people to bring about social and political change. Grassroots movements that mobilize diverse constituencies are certainly no elixir—but they do tend to be the drivers of democratic change.

Researcher Masooda Bano describes a pattern in the literature on NGO funding that refers to the rise of a new elite, including "the emergence of a vertical, institutionalized, and isolated (although well-funded) civic community."[17] She concludes,

> This literature indicates that rather than strengthening civil society or building social capital, donor aid has led to the rise of a specific kind of civic group, the NGOs whose members claim to work for a group other than themselves but whose characteristics and modus operandi are very different from those of the groups that traditionally played this role in these societies prior to the arrival of development aid.[18]

The citizens' calls for change in North Africa and the Middle East did not come primarily through professional, foreign-funded NGOs, despite their proliferation in countries like Egypt and Tunisia. One research paper, looking at the recent years of social and political change in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, and Jordan, noted,

> In no case did the initiative for pro-democracy demonstrations come from "civil society organizations". [They]…were not the result of proliferating NGOs or "building civil society." Rather…the consequence of converging vectors of diverse social protest movements over the previous decades involving urban intelligentsia, disaffected educated youth, blue and white-collar workers and professionals.[19]

In northern Sudan, the national-level NGO platforms supported by donors were found to be working on the political and institutional dimensions of peacebuilding disconnected from other local—and grassroots—actors, priorities, and needs.[20] A study of an accountability program in Pakistan funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) found that the program did not invigorate new associations or include those typically marginalized from power processes. Instead, members of trained groups joined because they were well connected and experienced in supporting NGOs. In the opinion of these members,

> donors had effectively created two classes of active citizenry: "social activists" who regardless of the monetary reward are genuinely interested in joining associations that work towards the public good; and "social contractors" that seek successive opportunities to profit from NGOs or pursue personal agendas, such as career advancement.[21]

When donor support does go to more grassroots-oriented organizations, often in the service-delivery space, this support is typically not linked to efforts to improve policy advocacy and responsive governance. Fragile and conflict-affected contexts face particular challenges in that violence often erodes the social cohesion and networks required for mobilizing and sustaining social movements. Furthermore, as an interviewee from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) noted, often civic movements, particularly youth-led movements, lack the basic accounting and management skills to effectively absorb resources, particularly those coming from the outside. This lack is a critical challenge to donor support given the priority donors attach to accountability and formal reporting.[22]

In Afghanistan, although changes in the political situation have allowed civil society to grow, the availability of aid and the way in which it is programed and delivered has no doubt

privileged the burgeoning of specific forms of organized civil society that respond well to international agendas. As one study of civil society in Afghanistan found, linkages with the donor community and securing donor support and funding usually result from the capacity of civil society to master "the language of donors."[23] Other studies point to similar findings, namely, that civil society as defined and supported by donors often privileges elite perspectives and organizations that have grasped donor rhetoric and procedures.[24]

Research in Bamiyan and Baghlan Provinces in Afghanistan similarly found that NGOs were the least trusted by local communities out of all local associations, community leaders, and government entities. In Uganda, foreign funding for NGOs was the single greatest factor in their survival. A study found that donors were much more concerned with efficiency than with legitimacy and their relationship with local communities.[25]

Similarly, locally supported organizations in Pakistan that accepted foreign funding exhibited many of the characteristics of the foreign-funded sector: They lost volunteers, could no longer raise local contributions, and found it difficult to stay focused on the cause they initially organized to address. On the other hand, those who resisted foreign funding often found it difficult to retain dedicated workers. Research determined that foreign-funded NGOs become so oriented on satisfying an external funder that local constituencies become of secondary relevance or irrelevance.[26]

Studies of civil society in the Palestinian Territories found similar problems.[27] In Yemen, high volumes of donor aid and support directly to the NGO sector since 2011 have prompted a sharp increase in the number of NGOs registered in the country. Yet as one interviewee argued, these NGOs, because they are accountable only to funders, do not represent the diverse views of people in the country.[28] The lack of popular support and involvement for what is largely an elite-oriented political settlement can lead to instability and a delegitimized peace process in Yemen in the longer term. We are currently witnessing the results of that weakness in Yemen. Various studies have recorded the mushrooming of NGOs in diverse contexts—yet these new NGOs have no members.[29]

Despite widespread critiques of "NGO-ization," donors appear to struggle to engage with forms of citizen groups other than NGOs. A former U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) official acknowledged that USAID had a "mixed record" of supporting campaigns and movements and that the Arab Spring created "a new urgency" that the agency has been forced to address.[30] USAID recognizes the critical importance of engaging nontraditional civil society and has made this part of its local systems development approach.[31] To understand how foreign aid might paralyze rather than catalyze citizen-led action and how such aid could be improved to support such action, it is important to examine the tools currently used by donors.

> *Research determined that foreign-funded NGOs become so oriented on satisfying an external funder that local constituencies become of secondary relevance or irrelevance.*

Challenges

Although a critical element in preventing violence and consolidating democratic progress, support for social movements doesn't come without its own challenges. Some of these challenges are associated with the nature of social movements and collective civic actions, others with the complex contexts in which they operate, and still others with donor constraints.

Social movements can certainly be encouraged to use, open, and effectively strengthen channels for participation in democratic processes. Doing so, however, is a challenge in fragile contexts and restrictive environments where governments actively suppress civic organizing. In such contexts, it can be difficult for movements to grow and maintain nonviolent discipline. Violent provocations, whether originating within the movement or from the government, can easily escalate into mass violence. Syria is one extreme recent example.

Disruptions to stability or perceived stability are commonly found to accompany large-scale civic actions like student-led sit-ins in Hong Kong, the lawyer-led march in Pakistan, or the Maidan mobilization in Ukraine. They can be unpredictable in both form and duration and thus create potential discomfort among donors. What will replace the status quo is also often unclear. The lack of vision can be seen as risky to external supporters aiming to ensure stability and security in the country. As another NED leader noted, civic actors in protest movements often have a hard time pivoting to political engagement. In Egypt, that the youth really had no plan for engaging with normal political processes after Mubarak's ouster was a major shortcoming.[32]

Other challenges for external supporters may be the party-based politicization of some movements (as has been the case recently in Pakistan) and their use of extra-institutional activities in their campaigns. Discomfort with the unpredictability represented by these nontraditional civic actors is one reason donors choose to invest in Western-oriented NGOs that focus on technocratic fixes to fundamental governance challenges. As democracy promotion experts Thomas Carothers and Diane de Gramont note,

> These [NGOs] generally confine themselves to unchallenging methods such as technical advice to government actors or participate in formal consultation processes, while avoiding more assertive strategies like mass mobilization, confrontation, and civil disobedience. Aid programs supporting change coalitions or other experiments with process-oriented mechanisms often emphasize cooperative assemblages of actors that seek only incremental change through legal and regulatory reform.[33]

Governance reform through normal political and legal channels is preferable. But it is unrealistic that such approaches will work for profound power disparities, or when those in control of the channels benefit from the status quo. Technocratic tweaks rarely if ever address endemic corruption. The fundamental challenge for external actors is not to find ways to prevent movements from forming but rather to help them manage the risks involved in challenging vested interests and power structures and to use their leverage with governments to allow space for nonviolent organizing.

Still, the reality is that the often fluid nature of civic movements, their diverse forms, and the frequent lack of formal institutional structures can be tricky for external donors to navigate. Donors are justified in asking whether support for civic groups is worth the risk of being forced to stop operations in the country. As one USAID official noted, the agency is forced to grapple with questions of how much it wants to confront the governments, how much the support will affect other programs, and whether it even has the tools to effectively support such efforts.[34]

Such determinations will be context specific and different external actors—government agencies versus NGOs or private foundations—have different comparative advantages in different contexts. Still, understanding what types of external support could most usefully aid nontraditional civic actors would enrich the decision-making process.

The fundamental challenge for external actors is not to find ways to prevent movements from forming but rather to help them manage the risks involved in challenging vested interests and power structures and to use their leverage with governments to allow space for nonviolent organizing.

Existing Tools and Limitations

Grant financing is the most common type of support offered to CSOs and is usually for specified, time-bound projects for which activities and results are predefined. In some instances, a cofinancing or even sweat equity or labor contribution to demonstrate local commitment may be required. These instruments are widely recognized as benefiting only a small segment of CSOs and excluding grassroots organizations without the resources and

know-how to seek out and appropriately respond to donor request for proposals (RFPs) or similar processes.[35] Although generally grassroots movements can more easily mobilize in-kind contributions from their communities, doing so may be more difficult in conflict-ridden areas and when local money is tainted by corruption.

In some cases, core funding—when an overall organizational budget is funded in part or whole by the grant—is provided to organizations, but only when the organization has demonstrated results (according to donor perceptions) and has a strong institutional structure.

The RFP process is often used to identify civil society actors to support. It emphasizes transparency and competition. It also tends to emphasize a broad sector or themes, such as citizen security or human rights, and seeks projects whose duration ranges from a few months to several years, twelve to eighteen months being the most common. The criteria used for evaluating proposals puts proven experience and projectized approaches to problems and planning, albeit short term, as priorities. Prerequisites are financial management and registration as a priority, both of which rule out the vast majority of grassroots movements and civic campaigns. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks are devised less to support adaptation to evolving contexts and more to measure and justify the result of the applied formula.

Technical assistance is a common form of support and includes office space, equipment, and individuals, sometimes budgeted for in the grant agreement, sometimes provided in kind. More innovative forms of technical assistance may help with overall strategy, communications, or outreach strategies.

Training is also a common form of support. It is often appropriate, given donor reporting and administrative requirements, for financial and other administrative staff. Leadership training typically covers strategy, management, and ethics. Training is often defined by donors' notions of effective organizations and tends to be fairly standardized when donors are involved in developing training agendas and curricula. It is also a commonly accepted practice that people are paid to participate in training and other events. The compensation becomes an incentive so that many training participants are often professional trainees. Meanwhile, it is common for trainees to "disappear" after training because no institutional capacity to absorb them is in place.[36]

In some cases, an analysis or mapping of civil society precedes the programming of technical support and training. Such analysis is often underpinned by a concept of what a healthy and effective civil society looks like.[37] Despite greater emphasis by aid agencies on analyzing the political and economic context in which they provide development assistance,[38] when it comes to civil society, donors still underanalyze what they mean by civil society, what they hope to achieve by supporting it, and what the risks and challenges are.

When it comes to civil society, donors still underanalyze what they mean by civil society, what they hope to achieve by supporting it, and what the risks and challenges are.

As one interviewee from a development agency explained in reference to the rise of the Arab Spring, "Despite being smart and experienced[…] development staff don't always have access to knowledge that would tell them what is really happening in a country during periods of complex transition…it's not a surprise that we missed opportunities to support the actors that did contribute to change."[39] On the other hand, anecdotal evidence abounds of locally-based American and foreign national staff from both USAID and NED who adeptly identified local partners and grantees highly skilled at mobilizing diverse constituencies. Another development expert noted an underinvestment in local research partnerships, particularly in transitional, conflict, and postconflict settings, which greatly hampers the type of understanding that should guide donor strategy and operations.[40]

These tools, commonly used by donors, have serious limitations in terms of supporting movements, rather than the traditional NGO. Application and reporting requirements, for example, have proven onerous for many local organizations. As a staff member from a small NGO in Calcutta insisted, "We cannot afford it any more. The bureaucratic systems of applying, reporting, and evaluation of projects turns such projects into too heavy a burden for us."[41]

Elements of an Alternative Approach

Assisting civic movements, as outlined, differs from the ways in which most donors support NGOs, from identifying entities for support to accountability mechanisms. Certain general guidelines point the way to identifying and engaging civic campaigns and movements.

Prioritize locally rooted nonviolent civic campaigns and movements. Such actors tend to be known and respected locally and to have demonstrable popular support. They may not be led by professionals and may not organize their work in the form of projects, but they often have positive links with professional institutions.

Identify local change agents from a broad spectrum of civil society that includes youth, artists, workers, women, professionals, journalists, and others specific to the cultural context. These networks should be developed and maintained on an ongoing basis by donor officials. When security restrictions preclude wide and regular exposure to such networks, local staff and consultants should be encouraged to help with outreach. Criteria for supporting local actors should be based on the clarity of their goals and needs, their volunteer base, locally raised financial contributions, and demonstrated ability to mobilize diverse groups.

Provide smaller, longer-term, and more flexible forms of financing. Onerous reporting requirements should be dropped for micro-grants below a certain threshold or for entities with already high local support and legitimacy. Simplifying and streamlining the processes for securing and maintaining funding is necessary. Relationship-based management—emphasizing text messages, e-mails, phone calls, and in-person conversations—combined with site visits can be more revealing than formal reports, especially for partners who do not speak English as a first language.

Language used in RFPs should be flexible enough to adapt to the best ideas that emerge locally and may already have demonstrable local support. Smaller, targeted grants that can be "surged" at key moments are helpful to civic mobilizers. Catalytic funding that is constant over a lengthier period is generally preferable to large sums of money with short-term windows for some organizations. For others, just-in-time support may be one-off and may need to be provided in a way that avoids lengthy administrative processes.

This approach is likely to be challenging for large bilateral and multilateral donors whose policies and procedures tend to be less flexible. Administering small grants to nontraditional actors is time consuming and demands deep familiarity with local actors and networks. To address this constraint, donors could provide umbrella grants to trusted NGOs that in turn could manage micro-grants. This approach would encourage productive partnerships between traditional and nontraditional civic actors yet allow each to focus on their comparative advantage. In Pakistan, USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) manages such partnerships through an umbrella grant to an NGO staffed by well-networked Pakistanis who headhunt and manage relationships with smaller entities. Alternatively, foundations or other nongovernmental actors less bound by donor requirements could take the lead in providing support to civic movements in more flexible ways.

If you must pay activists, don't overdo it. Assistance must be structured so that it does not create financial distortions, such as through above-market salaries or overgenerous budgets. Social psychology research suggests that such extrinsic rewards can reduce intrinsic motivation and completely displace it—such that the activity becomes dependent on the provision of external rewards.[42] This does not mean, however, that activists must be wealthy elites—though elites can be crucial interlocutors for disenfranchised groups.

Nonfinancial assistance may be helpful. Such support includes in-kind support of equipment and materials, solidarity support (regular communication with activists, dissemination of translated statements, and the like), or legal assistance. Training, when appropriately designed, has been quite useful. The Solidarity Center, part of the NED umbrella that supports labor

unions around the world, has provided training in collective bargaining skills that, combined with sustained communications with workers during government repression, proved particularly useful in Tunisia and Egypt.[43] The form and content of the trainings will differ greatly, however, from that commonly provided to NGOs. Capacity building that facilitates peer-to-peer learning and combines learning with doing (clinics) and mentoring tend to be far more useful than institutionally oriented or thematic training. Peer-to-peer trainings involving activists from different anticorruption movements have proved especially helpful.[44]

Ensure that funding does not stimulate new agendas or reframe local struggles. Successful movements and campaigns offer a compelling alternative vision to the status quo. Many countries offer a dynamic, indigenous environment for change. As an Asia Foundation report concludes about Pakistan, "Citizens groups are experts on their own political economies and often retain significant agency in the face of considerable challenges which, given the opportunity, they will use to organize collectively to improve their circumstances."[45]

Social and political goals organically emerging from local realities are far more likely to be met and sustained than those suggested by external actors. This doesn't mean that donors can't align with causes that forward their values. They should, however, align their objectives to the local environment rather than stimulate an environment where local change agents must adapt to donors to receive support.

Maximize local expressions. Human rights and peace goals usually have far more popular support when they draw on local expressions of these ideas and anchor their legitimacy in cultural codes. For example, when seeking support from religious Muslim audiences, turning to Islamic law as much as international law can help ground the work culturally.

Recognize when aid could delegitimize. As noted, governments often accuse civil society actors, particularly those that challenge their policies, of being tools of foreign governments. Donors should not be cowed into submission. They should, however, especially U.S. government agencies, heed the do-no-harm principle and avoid taking actions that might delegitimize homegrown movements, particularly those in the Muslim world. Typically, the more diverse and participatory the movements are, the more resistant they are to being associated with foreign agendas. Movements are legitimate if it is clear that the activists, rather than the donors, are driving the agenda. Involving multiple donors and local co-sponsorships can also help dampen the delegitimizing effects of bilateral foreign support.

How an assistance relationship is structured is also important. Donors may have to do away with branding and other visibility strategies and take advantage of opportunities to be transparent so that the goals and activities of the donor are understood. Many U.S.-supported programs are managed this way. A USAID assessment of support in the Dominican Republic highlighted the importance of maintaining a low profile, thereby allowing the grantees to take the visible lead.[46]

Continue to support NGOs that act as brokers and thus complement civic entities and social movements. The most valuable activity is to assist in accessing information, raising awareness of rights, and pushing for a widening of the democratic space within which civic campaigns and movements can emerge. In certain cases, as during the popular uprising against Hosni Mubarak in 2010 and 2011, well-respected NGOs offered office space and other in-kind support to social movements that led the mass mobilization efforts.[47] For donors, including USAID and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) currently planning the development of regional civil society hubs as part of the multilateral Stand with Civil Society initiative, it is worth considering how traditional NGOs and CSOs can help nontraditional groups engage with donors, governments, and private sector actors alike.[48] For OTI-funded initiatives in Pakistan, often no actual funding goes to the beneficiaries. Instead, an intermediary organization purchases and supplies the requested materials, does the accounting, and helps with monitoring and evaluation.

Movements are legitimate if it is clear that the activists, rather than the donors, are driving the agenda.

Help create enabling environments. Citizen campaigns and movements can be facilitated by certain environmental conditions: being able to access information, conduct outreach, and advertise activities without fear of serious repercussions. Organizations like the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, CIVICUS, and Charter 19 have focused extensively on both engaging with and challenging governments that are using legal and bureaucratic means to criminalize or severely restrict civil society activity. Donors with access to governments can assist in ensuring that peaceful protest is not criminalized and that institutionally a public sphere exists where debates can take place and alternative views can be expressed. Some donors may also be well placed to help promote, early on in the emergence of civic mobilization, effective channels for citizens to engage with the state. A conducive legal environment, political cover, open spaces for public dialogue—including the existence of independent media, a reliable mobile network, and Internet access—are all factors that support nonviolent mobilization efforts.

Encourage local philanthropy and social enterprise. Such efforts would include helping grantees establish a plan for sustained local funding. Initiatives for social change become successful and sustainable when they attract popular local support by demonstrating a shared belief in the cause, methods, and leadership. Local philanthropic sources are all too often overlooked or underappreciated. Given the difficulties of providing donor aid to civic actors in certain environments, and the unique funding requirements of campaigns and movements, tapping into self-sustaining local funding options can be critical. The Dutch civil society development organization, Hivos, has encouraged crowdsourced funding and the creation of investment funds to support sustainable local civic activity. Small and medium enterprises in the Philippines, Ukraine, and elsewhere have provided targeted, sometimes under-the-radar financial and other support to local pro-democracy movements.

Policy Recommendations

The outlined guidelines would improve donor efforts to identify and engage with local change agents. An important consideration in this regard is which external actors may be best placed to provide direct support and in which ways. Aid agencies, for example, may determine that local partners, such as local businesses and foundations, have the greatest reach, flexibility, and credibility to support nontraditional civil society actors, especially where security and suspicion of foreigners is high. But agency staff can remain informed of the changing contexts and potentially play support roles in managing political challenges. The following recommendations are outlined for aid agencies, foundations, businesses, and NGOs seeking to creatively support civic campaigns and movements.

1. **Prepare for nonlinearity of progress and extra-institutional actions and support nonviolent discipline**. External actors must come to terms with the fact that progress in consolidating democracy may not always be linear and that civic actors may choose to engage in nonviolent, extra-institutional tactics to advance social and political change. However, the popular movements in the Middle East and North Africa have shown that we cannot assume that such movements immediately lead to clear social or political outcomes, stability, or the kinds of political systems and leaders desirable to our governments. Because outside actors probably will not be able to prevent people from engaging in protests or other direct action, particularly if they are suffering acute grievances, to minimize risk of violent instability they could invest in helping civil societies develop the capacity to organize nonviolently and maintain nonviolent discipline. Research in this area makes it clear that civic actors can maximize discipline and resilience by taking certain actions. Diversifying tactics, broadening the base of participation, engaging government insiders, providing assurances

to security forces, and combining negotiations with nonviolent direct action are a few of these actions.[49] Outside actors are never in the best position to give strategic or tactical advice to local civic actors, but they are in a position to support capacity building for strategic, disciplined nonviolent action.

2. **Enhance our concept of what locally generated change really means.** Without a conceptual understanding and analytical tools for understanding and looking at the full range of formally and informally organized civil society, civic campaigns and movements will inevitably be largely left out of donor support. Activist networks, student unions, and cultural and professional groups are typically involved in civic actions, but their identification as potential partners for donors largely depends on whether they have come into contact with local aid officers. Astute local officers who have the backing of home authorities to engage with a broad range of civil society actors and provide seed funding to support their activities are critical players. Given the rapidly evolving nature of often diffuse and decentralized movements, analytical staff who monitor context and results outside the recipient organizations' framework would be important for informing, targeting, and tailoring external actors' support.

3. **Adapt our institutional resources, processes, and tools.** A real commitment is needed not only to channel support to the entities highlighted in this report but also to ensure that the support is relevant and sufficient to maintain the characteristics that render these entities such effective change agents. Money matters but is not the most important ingredient for social change efforts. Activism is critical, and disbursing foreign currency to those who promise to advance social goals can end up creating a marketplace for proclaimed and projectized activism.

Unfortunately, high priority countries and issues have been appropriating so much funding that donors must spend in bulk. Donors should instead emphasize small, flexible funding, which is most appropriate for low-cost social mobilization efforts that rely on volunteers and activists. Perversely, this space is often too small for donors to fund and too big for local supporters. This situation could justify an approach whereby private foundations and smaller donors take the lead in providing catalytic financial support to nontraditional actors and larger donors invest more in convening functions, peer-to-peer learning, and supporting an enabling environment for civic activism.

Equally if not more important, support for networking both within a country with similar organizations and across countries and regions—often known as South-South exchange—has been growing in popularity. If done well, it can be useful in creating global support and learning networks and in generating innovations outside a donor-driven agenda. Such support is highly relevant for civic campaigns and social movements.[50]

4. **Use more nuanced M&E tools. Different ways of thinking about objectives and of measuring success need to be developed.** The link between output and outcomes are often based on huge, untested assumptions without any research to justify why such assumptions are realistic or valid. For example, a log frame might link an output of "youth leaders trained" with outcomes like "youth become local leaders and catalysts for positive change" without recognizing the lack of a demonstrated relationship between these factors and that youth may more easily apply those skills in gangs and extremist groups.

A good start to more responsive and realistic interventions is to understand how local audiences assess the success of movements and campaigns: direct experience or observation; positive word-of-mouth from trusted, personal sources; having friends or family who are (uncompensated) participants or supporters; growing numbers of members; duration and consistency of work; and perceptions of the initiating individual or organization.[51] Giving more attention in evaluation efforts to ripple effects than to immediate beneficiaries is more appropriate for initiatives that aim to affect public consciousness and automatically reduces

emphasis on outputs and related assumptions. A good related proxy measure is an increasing number of members or supporters and development of stronger and more diverse coalitions, which can be gauged using social media tools, especially in efforts targeting youth.[52]

For Mosharraf Zaidi, head of a DFID-funded education campaign in Pakistan, the objective is discourse alternation. It is measured by how many times the campaign's messages are independently referenced in public discourse without prompting by the campaign, as in an opinion column or editorial. "People are not working around the clock because of the log frame. We knocked out those numbers six months ago. Our log frame stops at discourse alteration. Not us. We don't stop there. We are driven by the possibility of changing reality for fifty-two million kids in Pakistan, Inshallah."[53]

5. **Exercise trust (without disregarding oversight) instead of control.** A movement mindset would prioritize criteria such as local support, original agendas, and shoestring budgets to identify and select legitimate, local civil society partners and then manage with a light hand rather than create a management burden.

The relationship should mimic the one between local donors and the initiatives they support. Locally supported entities need to demonstrate effectiveness to foreign funders in the same ways they earn trust and credibility locally—through their work rather than paper trails. Aid officers must know the environments where they work, build up networks, and be able to operate reasonably freely, even in conflict countries. In an environment characterized by institutionalized risk-aversion, security challenges must be addressed in ways that will not undermine the ability of field officers to be contextually aware, entrepreneurial, and responsive. A USAID officer supporting stabilization efforts in a high-security environment admitted,

> Unlike other countries where I've worked, the level on which I know our work and partners here is pretty superficial. I don't know the people in this society, and I won't know them unless I'm allowed to know them.[54]

There can be little appetite in donor capitals for transferring control of foreign assistance to those on the ground. However, the cost of retaining control is too high, especially in terms of lost opportunities, misdirected dollars, and distorted projects. The benefits are not as great as we think they should be: Development agendas are continually frustrated and social transformation is not realized even though outputs are generated and projects seem to be successful on paper. One start would be for donors to develop a capacity to take risks for small funding grants, such as $2,000 to $30,000.

6. **Responding to and rewarding focus.** Successful nonviolent campaigns and movements are mission-focused and have clear goals. As discussed earlier, the specific and shifting nature of donor agendas makes it difficult for foreign-funded organizations to determine their priorities and stay focused on a mission and beneficiary population for longer than one to three years. It is clear from looking at the history and funding request of an organization whether they have operated as a service-provision contractor to donors or as activists committed to social change despite self-inflicted costs in time and money. Donors should avoid containing actions within arbitrary time frames and instead ensure that flexible funding is available year-round and that additional support can be provided as surge support when and as required. Flexible funding means also being able to support rather than direct agendas.

The best partners in the foreign-funded space tend to be those who have relied primarily on support from issue-based foundations, which tend both to provide long-term core support to partners rather than short-term project-based support and to give them latitude to design their own programs. Private corporations are also good donors for ideas that aim to have a public audience because they are often more flexible and easier to manage, although many initiators resent corporate branding.

Donors should avoid containing actions within arbitrary time frames and instead ensure that flexible funding is available year-round...flexible funding means also being able to support rather than direct agendas.

Conclusion

As donors and other aid providers grapple with the challenge of supporting civil society in restrictive environments or fragile states, they need to consider innovative ways to engage nontraditional civil society, including civic campaigns and movements that have historically driven social and political change. This approach is not without risk, however, given the complexity and informality of citizen movements. Traditional NGOs and CSOs will continue to play vital roles in supporting local populations with information and skills, but there is a need to better understand the sources of social change, the actors that drive them, and whether and how external actors can help. In many cases, any external assistance will damage the legitimacy of a campaign. But decisions not to assist should be made deliberately rather than in advance on the basis of the structure of assistance.

Likewise, decisions to assist should be made with the impact it might have on partners in mind. Applying more of a movement mindset when analyzing the local context; refining aid tools to support smaller, more agile funds; providing convening spaces for movement leaders, NGOs, and governments to meet; and emphasizing nonmonetary forms of support, like South-South horizontal learning, are a few ways to advance this vision. The regional hubs being developed by USAID, Sida, Aga Khan, and other donors, in cooperation with a broad array of civil society actors, could also advance these aims. Beyond these analytical and operational refinements, developing donor policies and strategies that prioritize innovative support to nontraditional civil society actors would go a long way to supporting locally driven development around the world.

Notes

1. See Thomas Carothers and Saskia Brechenmacher, "Closing Space: Democracy and Human Rights Support Under Fire," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2014; CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation has launched "Enabling Environment Index" to assess the environment for civil society globally. See www.civicus.org/eei/.

2. David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi, eds., *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Maiden, MA: Blackwell, 2004).

3. Nancy Whittier, "Meaning and Structure in Social Movements," in *Social Movements: Identity, Culture and the State*, ed. David S. Meyer, Nancy Whittier, and Belinda Robnett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

4. See Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (London: Palgrave, 2000).

5. Richard Stahler-Sholk, Harry E. Vanden, and Glen David Kuecker, "Globalizing Resistance: The New Politics of Social Movements in Latin America," *Latin American Perspectives* 34, no 2 (March 2007).

6. See CIVICUS, "State of Civil Society Report 2014," http://civicus.org/index.php/en/socs2014.

7. See Shaazka Beyerle, *Curtailing Corruption: People Power for Accountability and Justice* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2014).

8. Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

9. Ibid.

10. Freedom House, "How Freedom Is Won: From Civic Resistance to Durable Democracy," Washington, DC, 2005, www.nonviolent-conflict.org/images/stories/pdfs/how_freedom_is_won.pdf.

11. Beyerle, *Curtailing Corruption*.

12. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), "Support to Civil Society: Emerging Evaluation Lessons," Evaluation Insights no. 8, September 2013, 1–13, www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/Evaluation%20 Insight%20Civil%20Society%20FINAL%20for%20print%20and%20WEB%2020131004.pdf.

13. Task Team on CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment, "CSO Development Effectiveness and Enabling Environment: A Review of the Evidence," Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, OECD-DAC, Edita/Sida, 2011, http://cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/final_task_team_on_cso_development_effectiveness_and_enabling_environment_evidence_of_progress_on_aaa__en__.pdf.

14. World Bank, "Opening the Black Box, Social Accountability in Fragile Contexts," Draft Report, on file with the authors.

15. The White House, "Deepening U.S. Government Efforts to Collaborate with and Strengthen Civil Society," Presidential Memorandum, September 23, 2014, www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/23/presidential-memorandum-civil-society.

16. OECD, "Support to Civil Society," 1.

17. Sarah L. Henderson, "Selling Civil Society: Western Aid and the Nongovernmental Organization Sector in Russia," *Comparative Political Studies* 35, no. 2 (2002): 139, 140.

18. Masooda Bano, *Breakdown in Pakistan: How Aid Is Eroding Institutions of Collective Action* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 51.

19. Joel Beinin, "Civil Society, Social Movements, and the Arab Uprisings of 2011," Stanford University, August 2013, www.academia.edu/5139263/Civil_Society_Social_Movements_and_the_Arab_Uprisings_of_2011.

20. Jago Salmon et al., "Drivers of Change: Civil Society in Northern Sudan," analytical work to underpin DFID Country Assistance Planning, July 22, 2007, on file with the authors.

21. Tom Kirk, "Citizen-Led Accountability and Inclusivity in Pakistan," Asia Foundation, December 2014, p. 12.

22. Interview with Amira Maaty, senior program officer, Middle East and North Africa, National Endowment for Democracy, Washington, DC, August 14, 2014. See also Spiros Bougheas, Alessia Isopi, and Trudy Owens, "How Do Donors Allocate Funds to NGOs? Evidence from Uganda," CREDIT research paper no. 12/08, University of Nottingham, UK, www.nottingham.ac.uk/credit/documents/papers/12-08.pdf.

23. "Sign Posting Success, Civil Society in Afghanistan," final report, Internews and Altai Consulting, Kabul, November 2012.

24. Beinin, "Civil Society, Social Movements and the Arab Uprisings."

25. Bougheas, Isopi, and Owens, "How Do Donors Allocate Funds to NGOs?"

26. See Masooda Bano, "Dangerous Correlations: Aid's Impact on NGO's Performance and Ability to Mobilize Members in Pakistan," *World Development* 36, no. 11 (2008): 2297–313.

27. Nadia Hijab, "Rethinking Aid to Palestine," *Foreign Policy*, August 3, 2012.

28. Interview with Danya Greenfield, deputy director of Rafik Hariri Center at the Atlantic Council, October 8, 2014.

29. In Nepal, the number of NGOs rose from 220 in 1990 to 1,210 in 1993; in Bolivia, from 100 in 1980 to 530 in the early 1990s; and in Tunisia, from 1,886 in 1988 to 5,186 NGOs in 1991. See Bano, "Dangerous Correlations," 7, who aggregates this data from various sources.

30. Interview with former USAID official.

31. Interview with Larry Garber, DAA/Policy Planning and Learning, USAID, Washington, DC, July 16, 2014.

32. Interview with Barbara Haig, deputy to the president for policy and strategy, National Endowment for Democracy, Washington, DC, September 9, 2014.

33. Thomas Carothers and Diane de Gramont, *Development Aid Confronts Politics: The Almost Revolution* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2013).

34. Interview with Larry Garber, USAID PPD, July 17, 2014.

35. See, for example, Julien Bousac, Laure Delcour, Vera Riháčková, Iryna Solonenko, and Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan, "Improving the EU's Support for Civil Society in its Neighborhood: Rethinking Procedures, Ensuring that Practices

Evolve" (Brussels: Directorate General for External Policies of the Union, 2012), www.iris-france.org/docs/kfm_docs/docs/observatoire-voisinage-europeen/decembre-2012-est79413.pdf.

36. See Samia Waheed Altaf, *So Much Aid, So Little Development* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011) for an extensive discussion on the problems with training for health workers. In her interviews, most government officials admitted that they could not absorb new workers, and instead trainees would export themselves to the Middle East or go into private practice.

37. Tools used for such assessment include CIVICUS's Health of Civil Society diagnostic tool or the World Bank's Civil Society Assessment Tool (CSAT). Analytics may look not only at civil society but also consider an analysis of the state and market in relation to which civil society functions.

38. Carothers and Gramont, *Development Aid Confronts Politics*.

39. Interview with Jago Salmon, crisis governance specialist, United Nations Development Program, September 29, 2014.

40. Interview with Sharon Morris, senior conflict advisor, U.S. Institute of Peace, November 2014.

41. Interview conducted by Jorgen Johansen and shared with authors on September 5, 2014.

42. Mark R. Lepper, David Greene, and Richard Nisbet, "Undermining Children's Intrinsic Interest with Extrinsic Reward: A Test of 'Overjustification' Hypothesis," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 28 (1973): 129–37.

43. Interview with Shawna Bader-Blau, president, The Solidarity Center, Washington, DC, October 6, 2014.

44. Interview with Shaazka Beyerle, author of *Curtailing Corruption*, June 6, 2014.

45. Kirk, "Citizen-Led Accountability," 23.

46. DevTech, "Assessment of USAID Support for Civil Society Program in the Dominican Republic," 2002, www.devtechsys.com/practices/data-services/99-assessment-of-usaid-civil-society-program-in-the-dominican-republic.

47. Interview with Amira Maaty, senior program officer for the Middle East and North Africa, National Endowment for Democracy, Washington, DC, August 14, 2014.

48. See Maria J. Stephan, "Confronting Repression: Donors, Civic Groups Brainstorm Solutions," U.S. Institute of Peace, November 25, 2014, www.usip.org/publications/confronting-repression-donors-civic-groups-brainstorm-solutions. For more on the Stand with Civil Society initiative and concept for regional innovation hubs for civil society, see http://blog.usaid.gov/2014/10/standing-with-civil-society.

49. Chenoweth and Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works*.

50. Interview with Barbara Haig and Ivana Cvetkovic Bajrovic, senior program officer Europe, NED, October 2014.

51. Bano, *Breakdown in Pakistan*, 81–92.

52. Supporters must be organically generated rather than "bought" or "paid for" for this to be used as a valid proxy.

53. Interview with Mosharraf Zaidi, campaign director for Alif Ailaan, Islamabad, Pakistan, December 16, 2014.

54. Interview with USAID officer, December 15, 2014.

Of Related Interest

- *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* by John Paul Lederach (USIP Press, 1998)

- *Afghan Civil Society and a Comprehensive Peace Process* by Lisa Schirch (Peace Brief, July 2011)

- *Civil Society in Darfur: The Missing Peace* by Theodore Murphy and Jérôme Tubiana (Special Report, September 2010)

- *The Civil Society-Military Relationship in Afghanistan* by Lisa Schirch (Peace Brief, September 2010)