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(RE)LOCATING CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE POLITICS OF CIVIC DRIVEN CHANGE

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Abstract

Politics is central to development discourse yet remains peripheral. And, over some twenty years, a civil society narrative has not fulfilled its potential to 'bring politics back in'. Reasons can be found in conceptual confusion, in selectivity in donor thinking and policies towards civil society and in the growth-driven political economy of NGO-ism. Remedies for the political lacunae are being sought through a focus on rights, citizenship and leadership that show valuable, focused progress. This article examines a comprehensive complement to such efforts referred to as civic driven change (CDC). Originating in a grounded empirical approach, the constituent principles and elements of CDC offer a lens that can both sharpen and deepen insights and advance analysis of socio-political processes. As a work in progress, a CDC narrative is illustrated by reference to contemporary examples of citizen action that play out at multiple sites of governance.

INTRODUCTION

The insertion of 'civil society' into development debate has not lived up to expectations. The concepts' theoretical provenance offered an opportunity to respond to an oft repeated call to 'bring politics back in' to an essential position within aided development thinking and practice (e.g., Berntzen and Selle; 1990; Nederveen-Pieterse, 2002; Hickey, 2009).[1] Some twenty years of experience shows that selective variations of the concept have been deployed by western governments in support of a utilitarian interpretation and agenda propagating western universalism. The international aid system has been one important mechanism for doing so. Since the early nine-teen nineties, for official development agencies, a shift of policy perspectives from nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) in a 'third sector' to civil society as a political category offered an opportunity to re-think development in terms of the evolution of power relations between a state and the polity. It also offered a messy empirical category that could politically inform the conditionality of aid funding. Yet, over this period, civil society discourse has not managed to "… establish politics as a central concern within development studies …" (Hickey,

[1] Following Bebbington et al, 2008, a distinction is made between big 'D' development of societies as a whole over time and the little 'd' development associated with international aid and cooperation.

2009:141). Nevertheless, a recent review of development research confirms that this goal is as necessary as it ever was:

> "Development is Politics. The key message from all four research programmes has been the **centrality of politics** in building effective states and shaping development outcomes. It shows 'politics' not as an abstract concept, but as an essential determinant of the Millennium Development Goals – that is, better educated, healthier, more prosperous people. The research has delivered this message in many ways. **It provides evidence of politics as the 'driver of change'** and as the ultimate cause of people's security and access to justice. It shows how local the local political economy influences taxation, fragility and the ability of citizens to participate in their own development." (DFID, 2010:4, emphasis in the original)

A similar conclusion can be found in a recent, comprehensive review of Dutch aid policy and performance.

> "After all, aid is never innocent: it places countries in a dependent position and gives rise to all sorts of power politics in which individuals try to benefit themselves and their own people." (van Lieshout, Wendt and Kremer, 2010:266)

The fact that official aid for development and the dominant development narrative itself is a political instrument in a repertoire of international relations is hardly contested. Riddell (2007:398) contends that until aid is de-coupled from the systemic problems stemming from the bi-lateral interests of donor countries the quest for greater effectiveness will remain undermined. Yet, this reality is masked by assertions of poverty as the guiding criteria for aid with the Millennium Development Goals acting as the public justification for the deeper real-politic of aid allocations and its volatility an unreliability (Cogneau and Naudet, 2007; Bulir and Hamman, 2008). Whichever way one approaches aided development, politics matters a lot.

This article describes an ongoing effort to bring politics and socio-political processes into the core of development discourse.[2] It details the substance of civic driven change (CDC) as a novel narrative recognising, but conceptually relocating civil society. The following section offers a brief re-cap of how civil society has been variously understood and the problems that such a situation has created. This background is followed by a review of how the concept has been selectively applied in and by the official aid system to generally produce apolitical outcomes. It is argued that mutually supportive forces are involved which operate as an interlocked system in international aid. A result, described in section three, is a search for a way out of the current civil society impasse which responds to the more complex layers of political arrangements associated with globalization, advances in communications technology and the nature of the uncertainties faced by all societies. A concluding section describes what needs to be done to better comprehend and demonstrate CDC as an additional lens in the analytic repertoire of

[2] Here we borrow from Hickey (2009:142) in following his adoption of Mouffe's distinction between *politics* as the practices, discourses and rules of the game required for social order, while the *political* stems from the issues and struggles between social groups for power and resources.

development studies. This introductory broad treatment sets out the scope of what CDC is and has, potentially, to offer. As a work in progress, a finer grained analysis is part of future research plans and an anticipated series of publications.

CIVIL SOCIETY AS A DISCOURSE

Triggered by the implosion of authoritarian regimes in Latin America, Asia and Central Europe in the 1990s, the re-emergence of the notion of civil society into political theory and its contested meanings and interpretations are well documented and critiqued (e.g., Cohen and Erato, 1992; Hann and Dunn, 1996; Deakin, 2001; Hodgkinson and Foley, 2003; Chambers and Kymlicke, 2003; Edwards, 2004). In addition, narrow geo-historical origins of some two hundred years in western Europe and North America spurred debates on the concept's broader international validity (e.g., Blaney and Pasha, 1993; Kumar, 1993; Mamdani, 1996; Lewis, 2003) which have not produced a convincing outcome. In this sense, depending on your point of view, the search for a resolution of a civil society narrative has reached a dead end or remains an ongoing challenge. In either case, empirical study and resolution of contending positions is exacerbated by the difficulties of applying the concept to countries such as China and Vietnam which are adopting market economic principles while maintaining socio-political configurations deeply rooted in communism (Howell, 1993; Howell and Pearce2001).

It can be argued that civil society has been so variously understood as to be almost meaningless in terms of providing a coherent conceptual and empirical political-analytic framework. For example, the concept is used in a singular fashion, arguing that there is a 'civil society position' or a 'civil society interest', thereby ignoring those that disagree with this. A condition of multiple meanings is perpetuated because the alternative conceptualisations on offer are self-referential in terms of how civil society is defined and located in analysis of political processes and power relationships (Van Rooy, 1998). This makes robust comparison and empirical validation somewhat illusory. Glasius (2010: 1-2) illustrates alternative ways in which the civil society is understood, sometimes in

> "a number of quite different and sometimes contradictory normative connotations, stemming from different parts of its long intellectual history".

Glasius provides five examples:

> Civil society as **social capital**: through frequent association with each other in a variety of networks, *trust* between citizens is built up through a virtuous cycle of repeatedly meeting each other's expectations. This solves collective action problems and improves the well-being of the community and its citizens - a notion inspired by de Tocqueville and Putnam.
>
> Civil society as citizens **active in public affairs**: rather than just being producers and consumers, civil society denotes people's willingness to give time and attention to engagement in public affairs for the common good.

> Civil society as **non-violent** and resisting violence: it constitutes the recognition that resolving conflict through non-violent means is preferable to the use of force, and engages in non-violent and anti-violent collective action. Inspired by Gandhi and peace movements.
>
> Civil society as **fostering public debate**: this sees civil society as synonymous with the public sphere. In this sphere, through the media and venues of public debate such as town hall meetings, citizens debate each other with proposals for the public good, and through these deliberations better policy proposals are formulated, which informs formal politics. Inspired by Habermas.
>
> Civil society as **counter-hegemony**: while civil society is in part a hegemonic project of designing and disseminating ideologies that justify individual and collective differences in power and wealth, this sphere also gives space to doing the opposite: formulating and disseminating ideologies that challenge the powerful and champion the marginalised, through cultural institutions such as the media, churches, associations or trade unions. Initially one creates one's own counter-hegemonic institutions, but eventually the project is to 'overwhelm' the mainstream. Inspired by Gramsci." (Emphasis in original)

Glasius goes on to argue that a mix and match of these attributes and perspectives leads to different versions of civil society that satisfy neoliberal, liberal, radical and post-modern predispositions. This rendition corresponds to a debate which seems to be unable to advance a compelling theoretical proposition about the role of civil society in the trajectories and outcomes of ongoing political evolution within, between and above nation states. Assistance from other disciplines, such as international relations, does not seem to offer much hope for reconciliation or coherence. For example, when comparing three 'big visions' of the future world (dis)order Richard Betts (2010) argues that there is no unequivocal sign of a global convergence towards western configurations of state-society relations and related internal distribution of power. Modernization does not necessarily equal westernisation and economics does not necessarily triumph over (cultural) identity and dignity. Consequently, it is unwise to assume that an uncontested version of civil society will arise from processes of globalization any time soon.

Another problem is that the slant of these normative positions is one of civil society as naturally 'good' in the sense of seeking justice, fairness and some understanding of a collective good and collaborative problem solving that are all conducive to (re)establishing social order. The so called 'non-civic' part of civil society that also drives and act as protagonists in socio-political processes – oligarchic elites, terrorisms, corporate and drug cartels, human traffickers, sects or groups pre-disposed to violence, xenophobia and so on – seem to be ignored. Yet their existence and influence on issues such as limitations on civil liberties (Sidel, 2004), regime corruption and the politics of immigration are patently clear. Such forces in a 'warts and all' civil society and in development itself need to be better theoretically recognised and accounted for (Monga, 2008).

The conceptual and normative ambiguities of civil society described above are compounded by the empirical messiness of the socio-political motives, relationships, structures, forms, functions and expressions of a polity as it exerts agency. Experience of multi-country research projects on civil society – such as the Johns Hopkins quantitative comparative study and the qualitative Civicus Civil Society index – show a struggle to both delineate and investigate configurations and socio-political conditions, processes and agents that are 'invisible' to outsiders but very much visible to those involved (Biekart, 2008). This empirical difficulty is being exacerbated by the spontaneity and transience of collective action politics made increasingly possible by advances in communications technology where 'everybody' can be at the table (Shirky, 2008).

In sum, as currently pursued, civil society discourse is unresolvably too 'plural' and its context-specific expressions too diverse to offer a prospect of a making an unambiguous contribution to political theory and action. In a world that is becoming more interdependent with states less able to solve more (super) wicked problems and dilemmas alone (e.g., Rischard, 2002; Levin, Bernstein, Cashmore and Auld, 2009)[3], a civil society story will remain a useful but limited vantage point to adequately comprehend and explain the socio-political processes involved at their inter-connected scales. A more directly political approach is called for.

For reasons set out next, a similar argument can be made for the low probability that the concept and realities of civil society will bring politics into the centre of development studies.

THE POLITICS OF CIVIL SOCIETY AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Prior to the era of civil society discourse, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) had been the principle non-market driven, non-state actor gaining prominence in development theory, policy and practice premised on their assumed comparative advantages (e.g., Brown and Korten, 1989). , The subsequent global growth in numbers, scale and diversity since then makes general statements about NGOs problematic – there will always be specific exceptions in time and place that need to be recognised. With this caveat in mind, the advent of civil society into development analysis some twenty years ago involved twin processes of adjustment within the aid community. First, it was necessary to determine how exactly this concept would alter existing thinking about how change happens by whom. Second, was a challenge to incorporate NGO-ism[4] into this evolving and, for donors, new way of modelling development while, at the same time, operationalizing 'good governance' objectives and mainstreaming the New Policy Agenda.

[3] Super wicked problems are wicked problems with additional characteristics which include: (a) Time is running out; (b) No central authority; (c) those seeking to solve the problem are also causing it; and (d) the value of solutions is discounted in non-liner ways.

[4] Following Hilhorst, (2003) NGO-ism is understood as a set of expectations, assumptions, vocabulary and performance metrics of public benefit meriting tax concessions that are associated with western non-profit organisations self-mandated to undertake development work.

Much intellectual effort was applied to the former challenge. Contending ideas about what civil society was and did in 'big D' development were identified in terms of their 'small d' equivalents (fn.1., Van Rooy, 1998; Pratt, 2003). Others analysts took a more critical stance, pointing out the contradictions between the conceptual options on offer. With their increasing dependency on official aid, observers also questioned the willingness of NGOs to make hard choices between options under dominant conditions of neo-liberalism (Eade, 2000; Howell and Pearce, 2001). Expectations about NGO roles in support of material improvement and democratization in post-Soviet countries tried to combine these twin processes of adjustment to new conditions (Clayton, 1994, 1996). A moment and potential arose for civil society thinking to bring a more directly political dimension not just to national development but to NGOs themselves (Clark, 1991, 1993) and, subsequently, transnationally (Clark, 2003; Taylor, 2004; Batliwala and Brown, 2006). Some observers wondered if such an unanticipated shift in discourse with its multiple interpretations could re-invigorate an anticipation, from the nineteen seventies, that NGOs would offer an alternative, more politically 'activist' and progressive model of development thinking and practice (Fowler, 2006). In other words, could and would NGOs exploit the moment and re-grasp an opportunity to counter the social-welfare and participatory 'voice' bias of the official system towards NGO policy (Bebbington, Hickey and Mitlin, 2008:11-15)? For reasons set out below, this did not happen to any substantive degree. Growing expectations about the political potential of social movements, rather than NGOs, is but one indication of this outcome (Ghimire, 2005).

At a similar moment, the official aid system made – unsurprisingly - a relatively narrow selection between contenting theories of civil society in favour of those most consistent with liberal market democracy premised on negotiated processes of change in society (Riddell, 2007). This choice is illustrated, for example, in the remedial roles allocated to CSOs as part of structural adjustment policies (Lipton, 1991). Subsequently, the introduction of poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) required NGOs to take on 'participatory' functions that called for a more 'enabling environment' (World Bank, 2003). Sensitive to the 'sovereignty constraint' in international relations, alternative theories of civil society that embody political disputation and struggles for power were marginalised.

Within this overall ideological template, donor policies towards civic society as organisations (CSOs) showed modest variation in the mix of concepts employed (Giffen and Judge, 2010). Depending on the donor country concerned, normative plurality allowed for greater or lesser accommodation of 'progressive' NGOs. Over time, donor policy space opened up for inclusion of other types of entities. Faith-based groups, trade unions, and professional associations were recognised as member-based constituents of organised civil society with a developmental contribution to make. Be that as it may, the 'intermediation' function of NGOs in and between societies remained the dominant character of what, in many aided countries, became understood as civil society. Correspondingly, in equating NGOs with CSOs, regimes computed the latter as being of value when supplementing state social development efforts but with suspicion of non-service 'political' functions, such as advocacy. A 'backlash' against NGOs at the United

Nations signalled the discomfort of many (autocratic) regimes with CSOs gaining a bigger presence and influence in (inter)national bodies (Mohammed, 1997).

More directly, NGO-ism served as a financing source to the relief complements of armed resistance movements, such as the Ethiopian Relief and Rehabilitation Association. They also acted as a 'holding ground' for political aspirants within the then prevailing single party political systems. It was tacitly understood that NGO-ism would and could be 'political' in serving a donor's foreign policy imperatives, but could not be overtly recognised as such (Biekart, 2005). Thus, by and large, NGOs did not provoke an open debate on the politics of development and were criticised for simply aiding and abetting western interests. For example, protagonists across the NGO fault lines in the *Fifty Years is Enough* campaign against the World Bank speak to the different political positions in play. The mainstream NGO adoption of critical engagement towards such (inter-)governmental institutions may incrementally shift ideas and practices of official development institutions, but do not upset the prevailing neo-liberal perspective on civil society (e.g., World Vision, 1996). Looking back, the resulting conditions attached to public financing of NGOs for development activities - and the latter's responses to such conditions - point to a significant, but not exclusively, political-economy imperative for self-sustainability that has mitigated against them bringing politics back in.

Official conditionality towards aided CSOs has played out in many ways that lead to apolitical outcomes. First, it has discounted the significant diversity of inspirations, contending political forces and interfaces within civil society in favour of the service delivery and public accountability functions common to domestic non-profit organisations. As a consequence, an NGO choosing an alternative concept of civil society and other roles tends to self-exclude from direct support from official aid agencies. But, it also means that it is better able to mitigate against overly growth-driven organisational strategies which – in the name of the poor – would make them supplicants to donors that typically demand compliance with officially 'approved' technocratic development practices (Wallace, Crowther and Shephard, 1988; Wallace, Bornstein and Chapman, 2006). However, the proportion of official aid NGOs rely on has increased significantly over time.[5] This suggests many NGOs have not chosen against seeking public finance for their work. This process leads to self-restraint in adopting development theory or practice centred on politics. That is not to say, that NGOs are not politically aware or informed. But dependency on public finance, allied to risk aversion, predisposes to apolitical development practices – service delivery wins out over overt civic activism.

Second, a predominantly service and market perspective on what civil society has to contribute to 'small d' development has been reinforced by applying the concept and language of a 'sector' with roots in the economics of comparative advantage. This 'third sector' is often portrayed as a harmonious sphere in which all the anomalies of the market and the state are compensated, while conflicts between interests and anti-social behaviour

[5] Reliable figures on sources of NGO financing for development over time are not available. OECD/DAC statistics signal twenty years of substantial increases to NGOs as a 'sector'. When humanitarian aid is included

are ignored. The sector influence on identity is reinforced by the proposition that, as a sector, civil society can be 'enumerated' and its economic value computed (e.g., Salamon, 2010). Such a proposition and its effects on public policy negate and mask a civil society's fluid, spontaneous and politically dynamic expressions seen recently in North Africa and the Middle East. Negotiation within this frame impacts on NGO self-understanding towards an economic rather than political perspective (Johansson, et al, 2010).

As a consequence, treating oneself as part of a' sector' relies on (accountability) logics of efficiency and effectiveness of outputs. These metrics can also foster identity ambiguity for NGOs whose theory of change is disposed towards a more progressive position on civil society and hence on themselves (Shutt, 2009). The portrayal of civil society as one constituent in a tri-sector society model serves to either de-politicise or to tightly frame discourse towards existing dominant definitions of reality.

Fourth, as aided civil society, NGOs have often adopted an official development agenda focussed on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as paralleling efforts at donor harmonization - the Paris Agenda on aid effectiveness (Booth, 2008). The absence of politics associated with these frameworks is readily observed. So framed, advocacy and lobbying are, for example, directed at reforming governance through public policy and respect for human rights. In parallel, organisational competencies required to demonstrate a tangible contribution to MDGs associate NGO professionalism with (business) managerialism and its metrics. This expectation reinforces a common internal/governance pressure for year on year financial growth. This stance is inherent to non-profits as an organisational type (Kanter and Summers, 1987). An NGO growth orientation also has origins in Caritas where monetary turnover is a proxy measure of success, which combines with a business logic and measures in a prerogative to sustain the organisation.[6] Together, these factors bind NGOs to a 'follow the money' political economy (e.g., Albertyn and Tjønneland, 2010). This imperative is seen in INGO organisational adaptations to match changes in resource distribution mechanisms, such as donor decentralization in funding decision making (Ronalds, 2010). Moreover, the introduction of market-inspired competitive bidding accentuates a commodification of an NGO development approach. Such allocation practices work against treating sustainable development as a co-produced socio-political processes between people who are (not) poor and those working in solidarity with them. This negation of people's agency plays through the intermediation mechanism from North to South.

As role models, in aid recipient countries western NGOs invoke an exogenous understanding and frame of reference for what civil society means and does. A common result is the emergence of a strata of local NGOs playing an intermediation role that are semi-detached from their own society in terms of norms, cultural; embedding and financing. The processes involved correspond more to social entrepreneurship than the spirit of voluntarism that NGO-ism used to portray. In itself, if honestly recognised, this outcome is not necessarily harmful, albeit difficult to sustain outside of foreign financing.

[6] The technical difficulties of measuring development performance help perpetuate growth as a proxy for success and indicator of organisational health.

But transmission by northern NGOs of the economic imperative to be self-sustained, works against taking a politically-centred stance to change society. Calculated risk aversion is also involved, from which NGOs are seldom sites of mobilization of a followership with a political agenda. While they may help create supportive conditions and necessary capabilities, this type of action civic action is more likely to arise within endogenous forces of civil society.

The forgoing does not imply that aided civil society has failed in its quest to save lives, help people escape poverty, protect the vulnerable, increase resources for non-state actors, introduce valuable innovations, influenced critical national and international policies, provided political refuge and form important international networks across civic actors. The point is that these achievements have not substantively advanced the political character and foundation for realising development outcomes. We are not arguing that civil society discourse as currently applied has lost its value or should be replaced. Rather we contend that the way civil society is understood and deployed within the context of aid is too limited and de-politicised to illuminate contemporary socio-political processes of change within, between and above nation states.

This state of affairs in aided development debate has not gone unnoticed. For example, a common NGO critique from the political left informs initiatives such as the World Social Forum (WSF) (e.g., Sen, et al, 2007; Bond, 2010). Heated debates at WSF about a new economic model and new politics to remedy the failures of the liberal macro-economic and party systems are not common, however, in other international NGO forums. While acting as a counter-point to dominant narratives, WSF's effects on centring politics in development discourse remain limited, in part because the whole notion of 'development' is essentially contested.

Another response is seen in initiatives that seek a more foundational political discourse by invoking human rights and citizenship (Gaventa, 2006).[7] These advances tend to work with a political narrative of power associated with identity, participation and engagement between claimants and duty bearers. Such a point of entry has brought gains on many fronts, for example, in terms of insights about the nature of citizenship as a process of becoming rather than as a conferred legal status (Gaventa, 2006). In addition, common assumptions about the relationships between people's voices and the effectiveness of articulation through different types of civic formation have been tested and challenged (Gaventa and Barrett, 2010). However, in doing so, concentration on the poor or excluded in relation to the state, has often been at the cost of: (1) the significance of citizen-to-citizen interaction within civil society that does not, a priori, lead to state 'fragility'; (2) adequate attention to the uncivil dimensions of political agency; and (3) applying citizenship across all facets and institutions of a society as political project. Consequently, while drawing on this work, a further step was needed to establish a politically-centred narrative of development – both with a big D and small d – which was not hampered by the selectivity of, as well as impasse in, existing civil society discourse. An initiative in this direction started some three years ago and is the subject of subsequent sections.

[7] E.g., <www.ids.ac/drc>

Thirdly, though not adopting a civil society perspective - sponsored by bilateral donors, NGOs and a foundation - a recent initiative in a similar direction is the Development Leadership Programme (DLP) which:

> "… addresses an important gap in international thinking and policy about the critical role played by leaders, elites and coalitions in the politics of development. This growing program brings together business, academic and civil society partners from around the world to explore the role of human agency in the processes of development. DLP will address the policy, strategic and operational implications of 'thinking and working politically' - for example, about how to help key players solve collective action problems, forge developmental coalitions, negotiate effective institutions and build stable states." (DLP, 2011.i)

As will be seen, there are a number of findings from a review of case studies initiated by DLP that reinforce those which underpin civic drive change.

CIVIC DRIVEN CHANGE: ESTABLISHING A NARRATIVE

What has emerged as a narrative of Civic Driven Change is the product of multiple discussions with some of the key Dutch development NGOs.[8] The debate was driven by frustration at the lack of a self-determined and robust story with which to proactively shape how the Netherlands' government was shifting its policy and practice of funding towards these private aid agencies. Over several political cycles, Dutch NGOs - working for 75 per cent or more with government subsidies - had questioned state-crafted understandings and positions on what was proposed as its NGO funding priorities, criteria and measures. The Ministry's perspective increasingly reflected a utilitarian ascription of the role of civil society organisations with Dutch features of social welfare and 'pillarization'.[9] Investing in the search for a NGO/CSO narrative that would stand in its own right with its own ontology would be a valuable but uncertain effort worth taking. Following a grounded empirical methodology, a multi-disciplinary international team contributed to the emergence of a narrative centrally informed by civic agency (Fowler and Biekart, 2008). The following sections concentrate on CDC's substance with selected illustrations and discussion of its theoretical location. It is a work in progress continuing to absorb feedback and critique.[10]

The substance

As the theoretical debate elaborated in the next section will demonstrate, civic driven change is a composite of pre-existing ideas and theories that are connected in a novel way. CDC can be described in terms of major propositions which translate into core elements.

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[8] These Dutch NGOs included Hivos, Cordaid, Oxfam-Novib, ICCO, SNV, Pax Christi, and Context.

[9] The term on Dutch is 'verzuiling' and alludes to the physical pillars used to support cities and used as a metaphor for a social structuration based on religious differences and a culture of tolerance for diversity.

[10] We are grateful to a series of critical inputs to this work from: Harry Boyte, Lucia Boxelaer, Mike Edwards, Georgina Gomez, Bert Helmsing, Remko Berkhout, Marlieke Kieboom, Peter Knorringa, Monique Kremer, Jenny Pearce, Josine Stremmelaar,

In order to reduce the possibility of misunderstanding and misappropriation of meaning at this stage of exploration, to describe CDC, we try to avoid using vocabulary commonly deployed in aided-development discourse. For example, in CDC terms, a *participant* is a *citizen*; *participation* is understood as *civic agency*; *partnership* is understood as a type of *collaboration*; and a *project* is treated as a *case* of civic agency, beneficiaries are *constituencies.* Bearing language in mind, the substance of CDC can be summarised in four basic propositions and eight elements. These constituent parts form a composite lens that can be applied to illuminate and understand human agency in processes of socio-political change.

CDC propositions and constituent elements

The individual and comparative case analysis underpinning CDC pointed towards four critical perspectives on how society can be conceived and its trajectories understood. It does so within a political framework provided by a nation state and its foundation on the concepts of citizenship and rights – both of which can be problematized.

For CDC, the first proposition is that societies are regarded as 'political projects' where all walks of life contain various types of power, political forces and players. All people act politically in what they do or don't do with their lives. This requirement for political centring in development thinking is stressed by Hickey (2009:142). Second, civic agency is the principle, normative unit of concern where history, context and power to define the situation matter (Goldfarb, 2006). Being 'civic' is understood to mean pro-social behaviours that respect difference between people and shows concern for the whole of society and not just for self (Fowler, 2009).[11] Historically, countering uncivil behaviour – intolerance, discrimination, exploitation – are part and parcel of social structuration and a polity's struggle with itself.[12] That socio-political change in society is driven by both civic and uncivil agency needs to be seen and explained (Monga, 2008). A third proposition advances an appreciative position (Cooperrider, 1989) on social realities and on solving (wicked) problems which are understood as the unfulfilled imagination of a preferred situation. Living together inevitably generates dilemmas of collective action. Solutions call for imagination which co-defines a desired future situation which attracts the initiative, energy and agency of many – for example towards a sustainable ecology or a world without hunger (Ostrom, 2005). Fourthly, development is an inherently uncertain, complex, indeterminate process involving societal co-production for good or ill (e.g., Jervis, 1997; Beinhocker, 2006). The drivers involved demonstrate conflict and contention as well as collaboration and sharing (Seabright, 2004).

These propositions translate into a set of elements that are connected in different ways by existing bodies of theory and practice discussed in subsequent sections. The constituent elements of civic driven change have the following eight characteristics. In a sense they compositely 'define' what can be understood as civic driven change in their combination rather than in their singularities.

[11] In Confucian philosophy, these two conditions are prerequisites for social order.

[12] The paradox of uncivil behaviour like street protests and insurrection for greater civil ends remains and can only be judged case by case in terms of outcomes.

(i) CDC relies on a rights-based understanding of political agency tied to citizenship that is simultaneously an individual and a collective identity. It is a defining relationship between a state and the polity. Legitimacy of the former calls for active, informed involvement by the latter. Where citizenship is not in play and the right to have rights is not honoured by a state - and there are a number of such situations - this latter condition needs first to be fulfilled. The ideological stance of North Korea towards its citizens, intolerance of public dissent in Turkmenistan , rule by autocratic regimes in the Middle East create conditions where active citizenship, be it allowed on paper, is denied in practice.

(ii) CDC is not sector-bound. A CDC lens focuses on civic action for good or ill throughout all realms and institutions of society rather than a pre-occupation with civil society that has been uncritically conceived as only working for public benefit. Put another way, CDC is not located in institutionally specific ways – it does not 'belong' to civil society. The recent revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt and similar civic action elsewhere did not emerge from a 'sector' but from people in all walks of life that had experienced unemployment, giving bribes to stay in business, been compromised by security services to spy on their neighbours and family, experienced denial as political opposition and so on (Al Aswany, 2004). These micro politics combine to frustration that breeds radicalism and mass public dissent with an unlikely trigger of self-immolation. Such drivers of civic energy are not confined to the poor, marginalised or civil society as such but to the polity at large.

(iii) CDC is open and scalable. Civic agency can be observed at any (aggregate) level of socio-political arrangements as well as horizontally through, for example, self-organised network relationships. It incorporates links from local to global change and back again as an iterative process. The political effects of combining civic agency through social media – again Egypt is an illustration, as was the Battle for Seattle at the World Trade Organisation Ministers meeting in 1999. While most visible when involving violence which draws media attention, such events show how what is politically micro and local can self-organise and scale in an organic ways nationally and internationally. The UN Global Compact for Business and the impact of transnational civil society on multi-lateral institutions are both examples of micro to macro scaling of civic agency, most acutely today with responses to environmental concerns. On a daily basis, changes in household behaviour towards domestic waste and its local processing 'aggregate' to a significant scale in environmental effects but offer no dramatic images that capture media attention. The propositions underpinning CDC are not self-limited in terms of the socio-political span they can embrace and connect.

(iv) CDC takes as a maxim the requirement for equity of political agency rather than equity of economic opportunity that informs dominant sector-based theories of change. Inequity in political agency is often captured in the notion of 'exclusion' from influencing power relationships. Typically, this results from a lack of capability for socio-political engagement stemming, for example, from lack of organisational skills, inadequate knowledge of rights or of how decision making should work, or historical-

cultural barriers to recognition as a political actor. Overcoming political exclusion may call for 'uncivil' behaviour. Naomi Hossain (2009) illustrates that 'rude' claiming making on bureaucrats by poor women from socially excluded groups can make good against gender-based inequities in agency.

(v) CDC looks beyond political structures and mechanisms, such as voting, to the historical processes and fundamentals of power accumulation and reproduction in a country and internationally. Politics in much of, for example, Central America and Africa cannot be understood outside of the social fracturing caused by colonial penetration on whatever socio-political arrangements were already in place (e.g., Herbst, 2001). What becomes political and why in whose favour over time is the exposed tip of an iceberg containing the deeper political forces that establish regime (il)legitimacy to be recognised but not to be interpreted on exogenous terms.

(vi) CDC is sensitive to contention between endogenous and exogenous values, measures and processes. It distinguishes between aided and unaided change in society, which heightens attention to the role and power of outsiders in influencing socio-political and other processes, including how risks are distributed. The continual struggle for 'authentic partnership' is a well documented case of structural power asymmetry between aid actors. It is tied to money and assumed primacy of western 'enlightenment' norms and predispositions towards tangible forms and products over relationships and intangible processes. This 'values' factor in aided change plays out strongly, for example, in prescription of institutional forms that simply will not work as outsiders intend. From comprehensive, comparative study of governance, Mick Moore and Sue Unsworth (2010:77) reach a supporting conclusion that:

> " … donors need to turn the picture upside down, and develop new drawing skills. Unless they do so, they will not make the necessary investment in understanding local political dynamics, or make fundamental changes in their own organisation, values, attitudes and behaviour. In short, they will find it very difficult to resist the temptation to revert to the default position of viewing the world through an OECD lens."

(vii) CDC recognises multiple knowledges that inform agency. It places trust in people's own sites of knowledge-making which does not necessarily make them right, but is the well-spring for learning and self-capacitation. Farming systems in developing countries have long been sites where endogenous agricultural knowledge has gained a place alongside that of scientists to steer research investment. In South Africa's Eastern Cape, on-the-street knowledge about local conditions is being captured and disseminated by a civic unit of a Newspaper's journalists who set up shop in cafes and taxi ranks to directly hear what is bugging people on public issues. This daily monitoring of what people see municipalities are doing rather than saying is increasing bottom-up pressure to improve public services.[13]

(viii) CDC recognises multiple types and locations of authority and governance and reactions to them. Authority over and accountability to a polity is located in different

[13] http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/196/15/52619.html, accessed 2nd May 2011

places for different things. For example, in signing up for Codes of Conduct and accountability charters, NGOs choose to cede some sovereignty in exchange for the collective value of complying with negotiated standards. In the European Union, elevation of political authority to a multi-country parliament while pursuing subsidiarity creates multiple new sites of governance that citizens interface with, but may not trust or understand. The World Trade Organisation can pass binding 'top-down' judgments on the legal provisions of member states. The Kwanda project in South Africa illustrates how increases in a community's capabilities for self-organisation can, from the bottom up, impact on many levels of public authority and policy. Examples include: changes to national approaches to community policing; changes in municipal conditions for liquor licensing; local enforcement of bar owners making food available with closing times that reduced incidents of rape.[14] Poly centricity of governance is an increasing phenomenon that must be factored into viewing socio-political processes and the institutions involved (McGinnis, 2005).

For any given context and socio-political process, each of these elements has its own scales, time lines, metrics and relative weights that are not static or immutable. Crudely framed, driven by inspirations to change domains of life within society, the CDC narrative is often about the politics of people moving *From Clients to Citizens* (Mathie and Cunningham, 2008).

Domains

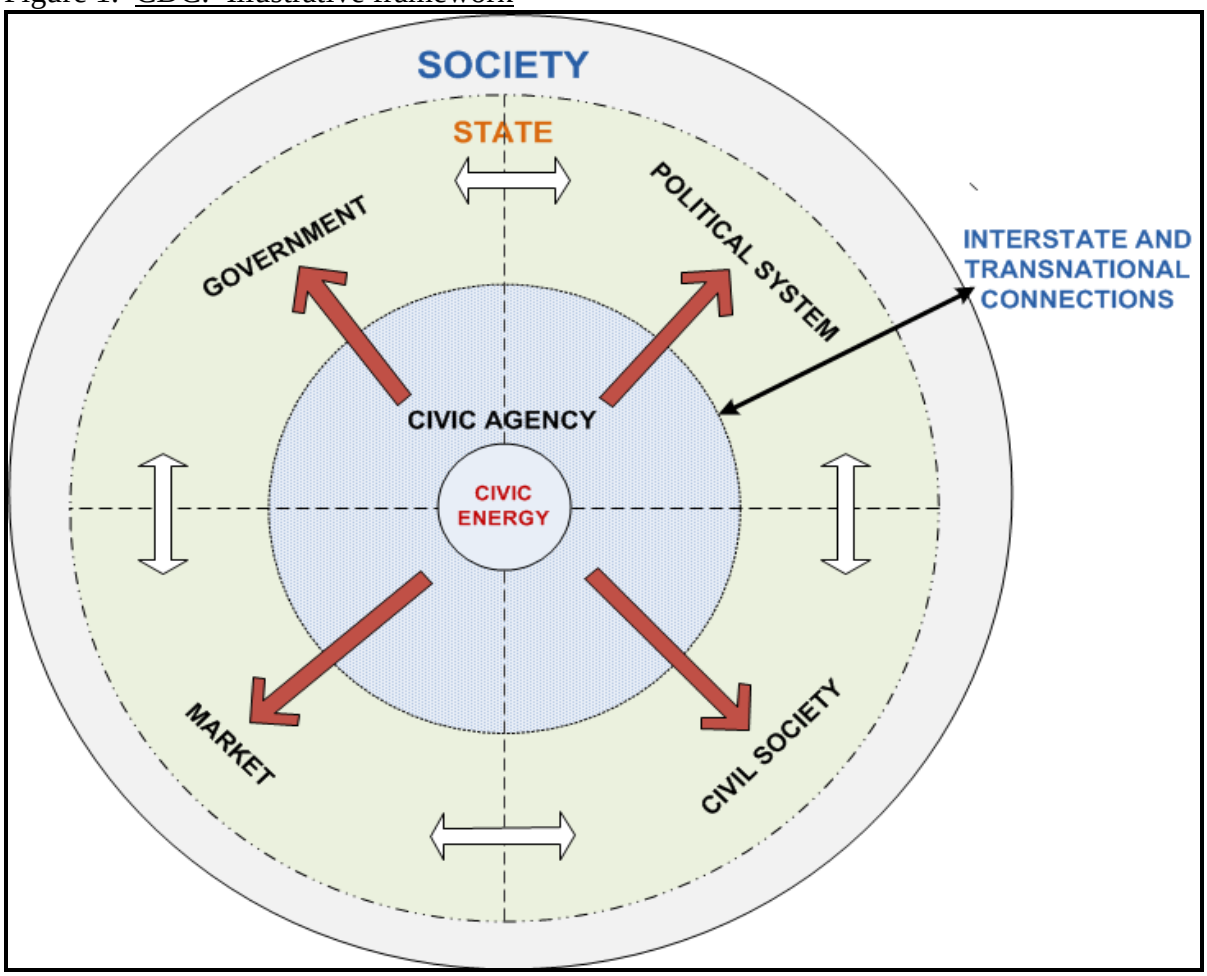
CDC relies on the concept of socio-political *domain* centred on an imagined future of a 'solved' wicked problem. The idea of a domain has a strong affinity with Bourdieu's (1977) concept of 'social field'. These are understood as social arenas governed by distinctive values and approaches which emphasise their contested nature and the role of power in resolving contests, which are inherent to complex problems and social dilemmas.[15] *The significance of social fields is their detachment from any particular actor* because they also exist as internalised mental elements or frames of reference or norms and cultural rules that co-inhabit a person's psycho-social construct, their *habitus.* In practical terms, a domain can be viewed as a substantive theme or desired future condition which holds society's attention and attracts civic agency from any quarter. Examples are corruption as a non-sector specific uncivil behaviour; as is discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation; or social enterprise heralded in new forms of 'low profit limited liability company (an L3);[16] or mega-philanthropy as a composite of public and private, market and on-market principles with political effects in terms for example, of displacing state responsibility for the provision of public goods (Edwards, 2009). Informed by the imagined future of interest, domains supersede and selectively combine sectors. It can incorporate a polity's transnationalism, now being accelerated by expanding internet access as well as net-enabled cell phone technology fostering social networks and user-driven media (Kanter and Fine, 2010). Figure 1. Illustrates the centrality of civic agency in the CDC narrative.

[14] www.seriti.org.za http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOnb4HRJTp0

[15] Social fields, are also found in complexity theory as forces operating and amenable to transmission over a societal distance. Jung's notion of collective consciousness of a society acts in such a way.

[16] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L3C

Figure 1. CDC: Illustrative framework



Operating within families and often mediated through groups – for example, with religious or cultural ties - civic agency is motivated human energy with sources and drivers. A core task of a CDC lens is to assist in homing in on the origins, expressions and combining of civic energy with a sorting and filtering through socio-political processes and power to shape collective action and institutional responses to wicked problems, understood as selected domains of change.[17] Simply put, to deepen and sharpen insights in why and how polity, politics and the political work as a society's drivers. This challenge is described by the Development Leadership Programme in the following way:

> "… if one is taking politics seriously, *agency matters*. By 'agency' is meant the choices, decisions and actions of individuals, groups and organizations and, in particular, their leaders and 'elites'. They have the potential to change things. Just as structures (institutions, rules, cultural norms) have 'causal power' (that is, they have power to influence what we do), so too do agents, though their causal power is different …" (DLP 2010:5, emphasis in original).

CIVIC DRIVEN CHANGE: THEORETICAL LOCATION

[17] We are grateful to Mike Edwards for this observation.

Civic driven change can be visualised in association with three 'families' of theory, some more closely related than others. One grouping is composed of theories associated with human and civic agency. Another concerns micro-politics allied to collective action. A third set unpacks power. The composite nature of CDC brings these theories together in a coherent way bounded by the national state as a political project premised on the legitimizing existence of citizens.[18]

Civic agency

In a comprehensive treatment of the topic, Emirbayer and Mische (1998:963) argue that, in sociology, human agency has not been adequately addressed as an analytic category in its own right. In their view, agency is an interplay between: (1) past routine, experience and learning, energised by (2) images of a desired future situation, which is then (3) situationally-judged for achievability and risk, from which action may or may not be taken. Recent political upheavals in North Africa show how people's risk calculus can change quickly and radically. In this reflexive sense, inaction is also an action. Results of (in)action feed into capabilities and future decision processes leading to a constantly self-developing and updated condition of capability, appraisal and decision choice. At a given moment, any one of the three elements determining agency dominate, but all are present in agentic processes. For these authors, agency is thus defined as:

> "…the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporal-relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations". (Emirbayer and Mishe 1998:970)

Thus, agency is one category in a total repertoire of human behaviour. It is co-defined by orientation of personal or group action towards the stabilizing, enabling and constraining forces of social norms and values embedded in institutions (Walker and Ostrom, 2007). Agency can thus be interpreted as an *investment in a future that people care about.* CDC relates directly to the energising property of agency towards a future that can be 'imagined'. This reflects is an appreciative position on social problem solving.

However, agency itself is subject to human pre-dispositions towards others, themselves moderated by theories of the person. In terms of the former, an ontology of CDC in terms of 'civicness' is described in the essay by Evelina Dagnino (Fowler and Biekart, 2008:28).

> "… a critical task would be "to interrogate the ontological essence of civicness in relation to contending political projects, their actors and the material base from which they emerge and subsist. This assumes that there is an ontological essence of civicness. One challenge here is to think about what ideas could deserve this position without incurring in the reductive risks pointed out above. One possibility is to resort to ideas that share a conception of a basis for life in society. They run from Hannah Arendt's common world, to Marshall's "participation in the social heritage"; "a sort of basic human equality"; "the claim for recognition as full members of society". They may include Patrick Pharo's notion

[18] The problematic nature of citizenship as a concept and category that CDC relies on is substantially covered by the recent work of Institute of Development Studies and is not repeated.

> of an "ordinary civility", a set of rules (formalized or not, written or not) that make social relations and life in society possible: rules for co-existence, built-in in the intersubjective dimensions of social life, that only exist to the extent in which they are mutually recognized. What seems to be common in these views is a sort of a first basic preliminary layer of meaning in the civic: a disposition to live together in society, which sounds reasonable, largely shared and thus difficult to dismiss."[19]

She goes on to caution against any homogenous view on what this means (ibid:29):

> "Nevertheless, while equality establishes a connection between civicness, social justice, citizenship and democracy, it introduces grounds for differentiation and divergence.[20] Thus, different understandings of these ideas, associated to different political projects, imply different directions to civic agency. It should be clear that this connection is one possibility among many others (such as religion, for instance). But all these different links - historically and contextually produced - shape the meanings of civic and civic agency: its contents, its subjects, its concrete forms, its locations. Recognizing this diversity, and the dispute that pervades it, is a crucial preliminary task."

In CDC, the inter-subjectivity she speaks of in social relations is interpreted in terms of a 'culturalist' paradigm of the person. This is counterpoised to a dominant paradigm of the person:

> "… which infuses public policy, politics, institutional practice, and much of civic and democratic theory and civic action is largely derived from positivist social science and science, conceiving the human person in relatively static fashion as an aggregation of consumer needs, wants, and appetites. …."The contending culturalist framework conceives of the person in narrative terms, as immensely complex, dynamic, generative and "emergent," full of differing and often contested impulses and interests. It is attentive to *civic capacity building,* cultivation of skills, habits, orientations, and environments which enhance people's abilities for co-creation, or the ability to address common differences and to shape their circumstances across lines of bitter difference."[21]

Of particular concern in CDC's approach to agency is what it means to be 'civic'. Adopting a geo-historical reading locates the notion of 'civic' as a status-bound normative behaviour tied to the rights and responsibilities of those governing city states. In Heater's account (2004) the earliest references to 'civic' are allied to the concept of citizenship associated with a socio-political status accorded within Spartan communities and the governance of Athens. The corresponding tasks, authority and accountability of citizenship were accorded to selected individuals – propertied elites exhibiting valour, virtue and commanding influence. Women, slaves, labourers and craftsmen were excluded from this rank. Exclusion was the norm and remains so in many authoritarian-ruled societies. Citizens were recognised as political beings with rights to wield the power required to protect and 'justly' oversee and govern the affairs of rural communities

[19] This underlies an increasingly recurrent category in Brazil and other countries: the distinction between a *civil* and a *non-civil society*, referring, for instance, to drugs trafficking and criminal organized groups for whom the physical elimination of others is seen as a current element of social life.

[20] Differentiation and divergence may also be present in the definition of equality itself.

[21] Clarificatory contribution of Harry Boyte to a review of a CDC research proposal, 10, May 2010, mimeo.

and of urban city-states. There was stringent attention to citizens properly discharging their mutual duties which called for particular 'civil' behaviour in terms of constrained self-interest for the overall good. That which emerged as 'civic' – a normative property of citizenship - included responsibility for the proper servicing and management of public areas and of investments and resources derived from the functioning of the whole populace.

With an intervening history of western universalism, Hauguaard (1997:200) is at pains to remind us that 'civic' as conceived in CDC - concern for the whole and respect for difference - is not to be confused by or conflated with 'civilisation'. He cautions against comparing 'civilised' and 'uncivilised' societies because of the impossibility of appreciating the constraints under which they operate over time. In similar vein, a CDC lens must be cautious about applying normative features more widely than the minimum envisaged from the combination of ontology and histiography described so far. For CDC, this poses dilemmas of contextualisation, cultural relativity and positioning in terms of endogenous and exogenous values alluded to earlier.

From a socio-psychological angle, being civic implies a state of self-awareness or mindfulness about humanity and its place in nature. This condition may involve spirituality, theology, rationality and other frames of reference in a *habitus* of schemata and dispositions which co-inform attitudes towards others and towards power (Mwaura, 2008). In this vein, public debates about CDC note the importance of the 'self' in what civic agency means. For example, taking to heart the idea of being a global citizen with corresponding responsibilities:

> "… this could encompass a global citizenship outlook, which can be translated into civic actions such as ethical consumerism (consume less, buy fair trade, biological, seasonal and local produce), ethical producer-ism (corporate social responsibility and social business approaches), active citizenship (vote, be involved and engaged), ethical employee-ism (relate, take up responsibility)." (Berkhout, et al, 2011:14)

While this quotation is global in perspective, it actually involves civic agency confronted by many places where power within and over socio-political change plays out and need to be mediated and governed in one way or another. CDC as conceived is sensitive to this dimension of societal change.

Micro-politics, collective action and the public-private divide

> "It follows from this that thinking politically - and especially about the role of agency - requires us to focus on and *understand the micro-politics* of the phenomenon with which we are concerned. Understanding the structural and institutional contexts, and what is loosely called the 'political economy' is important, of course. But for working politically, there is simply no alternative to understanding, in detail, who the players are, what they do, where they come from, their organizational affiliations, networks, ideologies networks, ideologies and interests and the political dynamics of the issue or sector. Detailed political ethnography is needed." (DLP, 2011:5)

This quotation reflects the significance of delving into the fine-grained nature of socio-political process, particularly the *interface between civic agency and political society*. As

argued earlier, civic-driven change can be analysed at various socio-political levels, from local to global. However, it is the local level where civic agency generally manifests itself most clearly and is, apparently, least complex. It is this level where individuals, as citizens, consumers, clients, or co-producers take initiatives with public aims which shapes civic action. Goldfarb (2006), describes such processes as the 'politics of small things', that is routine, mundane practices led by ground-level social actors. When combined, aligned and energised, micro-politics can act as a fundamental political force which *redefines the situation against prevailing interpretations championed by the powerful*. The tenacity of protestors from all walks of life to recast and politically redefine Tunisia and Egypt is a potent example.

> "Informed by social movement theory about actors, agency and how change happens, we ended up asking the wrong questions as to why the people have risen. In Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, was there an organised social movement? Certainly not: Did they have visible leadership? No. Did they have a massive, or at least significant following? Not in the conventional sense of a mobilised constituency.
>
> Our analytical perspectives failed to enable us to 'see like citizens' and understand that people were overcoming barriers of fear and reaching breaking point." (Tadros, 2011)

Micro initiatives can be of a very different nature, from engaging in a debate on climate change around the kitchen-table, to putting a smart phone-filmed video of a Teheran oppositional demonstration on *You tube*, to actually taking risk as a civic actor on the streets. Benford and Snow (2000) have argued how 'collective action frames' are generated when initial initiatives come together and merge towards becoming movements with shared understandings of what needs to be changed. These are serious negotiations, often without mediation of formal groups or political parties. It is this breeding ground of informally negotiated, collective civic action where a CDC orientation is shaped, which therefore needs concrete underpinning.

In a CDC narrative, theories of collective action are important. A particularly critical theoretical angle - signalled in Chapter 10 of the CDC book (Fowler and Biekart, 2008:177) - is a potential guiding philosophy of co-responsibility for the world as a global commons. Here the work of Eleanor Ostrom (2005) on the complexity of public action theory, and the contrary historical lessons for collective versus private ownership (Harvey, 2011) are likely to be pertinent to approaching wicked problems that often appear as social dilemmas:

> "The term "social dilemma" refers to a setting in which individuals choose actions in an interdependent situation. If each individual in such situations selects strategies based on a calculus that maximizes short-term benefits to self, individuals will take actions that generate lower joint outcomes than could have been achieved." (Ostrom, 2005:4)

Olson's proposition that individuals will act collectively to provide private goods, but not if it concerns public goods, was elaborated by zooming in on the community level, where these differences are less articulated (Boyte, 2008). The private role of citizens often seems to be linked to economic roles when it also can be broadened to include social and political 'responsibility'. This in itself is an important debate about the line between

'civic-driven' and 'profit-driven', which relates to interfaces between civil society and markets. Such a discussion is also linked to the problematic use of the notion 'of 'social capital' in relation to empowerment (Harriss, 2002) which can shed light on the subtle shift in interpretation of 'private' and 'public' to focus on the real meanings of what 'civic' and 'civic agency' can imply for political change. This would include discussions about personal 'risk', strategies in the form of 'political projects' and public service-delivery aimed at 'co-production' at the local level in order to stimulate citizens' capacity to engage.

Power and empowerment

Political discourse is about power. The IDS programme researching citizenship provides an accessible categorization and analytic entry point (Gaventa, 2007:2).

> *"Power 'within'* often refers to gaining the sense of self-identity, confidence and awareness that is a pre-condition for action. *Power 'with'* refers to the synergy which can emerge through partnerships and collaboration with others, or through processes of collective action and alliance building. *Power 'over'* refers to the ability of the powerful to affect the actions and thought of the powerless. The *power 'to'* is important for the exercise of civic agency and to realise the potential of rights, citizenship or voice."

From a CDC point of view, this formulation is helpful but incomplete. Applying a power lens to socio-political processes needs to include theory that interrogates power as both individually socialised and embedded and actively constructed by interaction. This type of analysis spans from covert or hidden power to its more overt, institutionalised and transactional dimensions. For example, Bourdieu exposes power deeply hidden with acculturated world views and resulting predispositions towards and interpretations of identity and life's experiences (Navarro, 2007). The work of Lukes (2005) and others point to additional, progressively overt, expressions of power. One is the function of language to define the parameters of thought and nature of knowledge. Language also dictates public and private discussion, communications and messages, typically favouring existing systems of dominance. A further influence of language is to label 'reality' in ways that manipulate or mislead peoples' predispositions or cause them to misrecognise their 'objective' interests (Lukes, 2005:149). Further, Haugaard (1997) demonstrates how structuration of power co-determines processes of (political) inclusion and exclusion and the rules of the game in socio-political arrangements and engagement. Finally, many authors treat physical coercion and force as, often, the most visible manifestation of power upon which – in the Weberian sense – states enjoy a defining monopoly. To fully interrogate social arrangements with their political processes, a CDC lens should draw on comprehensive theories and articulations of power as process and as empirical, practical expression.

By way of illustration, Table 1 combines both ways of appreciating the qualities of power as an individual, collective and transactional phenomenon that can be empirically investigated, often in terms of civic agency capabilities and outcomes (Fowler, 2009). The table signals a bias towards power as an interactive property that is collectively generated applied in collective action found in a closer cluster of theories to CDC and problem solving. It is a first consideration of what a CDC power lens would focus in any

chosen domain that will undoubtedly require refinement through research on practical application.

Table 1. Power from a Civic Agency Perspective

Power Expressions/ Power Processes	**Power Within**	**Power With**	**Power To**	**Power Over**
Socio-psychological forming	Empowering acculturation and socialisation	Associating for public action	Selecting and living a self-determined identity	Assertion in society as a personal and joint political project
Controlling Language	Applying critical interpretations	Creating a shared vocabulary	Imposing or challenging discourses	Diversifying and gaining access to information
Controlling Rules	Knowing and asserting rights and interests	Negotiating collective outcomes	Imposing or challenging exclusion	(Co-)determining conventions, laws and policies
Applying coercion	Questioning expectations of self-compliance	Adopting protective collaboration	Opposing unaccountable authority	Just use of public instruments of physical force

Allied to power categories are theories of empowerment which link CDC to a family of ideas associated with an 'activist' reading of socio-political change. Drawing on the renewed interest for empowerment by liberation theology and feminism in the 1970s, CDC has been inspired by the work of Friedmann (1992) who has criticised the neo-liberal use of empowerment. He theorised poverty as the lack of access to social power, and pointed out that constraints were put on collective self-empowerment by tendencies to personalise empowerment strategies and reduce the attention for tackling structural conditions causing poverty. Despite this weakened use of 'empowerment', the concept remains very relevant for CDC especially when the meaning of power is further unpacked in ways described above.

The central idea is to counter the disempowering effect of 'internalised powerlessness', which had been flagged by Fanon (1986), Foucault (1987), and Freire's (1974) 'critical consciousness' , as well as several feminist authors (Rowlands, 1995; Mies & Bennholdt-Thomsen,1999). They point at the danger of stripping power from its transformative quality. Indeed, (civic) agency is a tool for targeting disempowering structures. In this vein, a CDC narrative combines toward a theory of empowerment beyond 'participation' to a developmental democracy emerging though active engagement of the polity which reinforces both citizenship and the state as an accountable and effective bearer of legitimate authority.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article responds to an enduring observation that, as a discipline, development studies is incomplete in the sense that politics as process and the political as substance have remained marginal. Recent analysis of development research continues to argue the case for bringing politics back in. We do so through a critical conclusion that twenty years of civil society discourse has not realised its potential to make the political central. While still of use for examining societal change, a civil society for understanding development needs to be 're-located' and refined to sharpen and deepen the political contours and

dynamics involved. Civic driven change is a way of doing so. The core of the CDC lens, also identified by others, is located in the notion of civic agency as an empirical category.

Civic driven change is a work in progress. To date are three years of public exposure through publications, presentations and dedicated events with encouraging and critical results.[22] This paper is a further step in testing the potential significance of a CDC narrative in current debates on how to better comprehend and act towards an era of greater political uncertainty, which is allied to a global inability to redress complex issues facing societies everywhere. Critical appraisal by others is invited and will be needed to home in on strengths and weaknesses.

Irrespective of what this invitation produces, experience to date signals areas where attention is required. A central challenge is to further explore the ontology relied on as a source of imagination-driven civic energy where complex human drivers of reproduction, identity and meaning are likely to be in play (Fowler, 2007). Another issue is to 'reconcile' the normative premises of civic agency with endogenous norms and values. The supposedly ontological roots of pro-social behaviour remain open to contextual interpretation that has to be dealt with conceptually and methodologically. A second challenge is how to make CDC-illuminated processes visible in terms of knowledge and inspiration. This requirement is particularly tricky when interventions, aided or otherwise, are not in play. In effect it requires exposing and communicating about underlying forces that inhabit daily practices and relations that drive the socio-political factors in domains of concern. In turn, this calls for practical ways to understand and delineate what a domain involves. Attention is also called for in terms of the moral dilemmas of applying uncivil means – such as public disobedience and confrontations with authority and between social groups – to achieve civic outcomes. Finally, an issue remains about what, if anything, CDC can contribute to the generally unsatisfactory state of effectiveness with international aid. If aid as currently envisaged and applied is too seldom able to support endogenous civic agency without undermining it, can a CDC perspective assist in revising development practice towards a better and more honest appreciation of power and the limited role of outsiders?

[22] <www.civicdrivenchange.org>

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