

# Essay 1

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## Civic Driven Change

### Citizen's Imagination in Action

#### Introduction

This book on civic-driven change is the product of an eight-month process of collective thinking and debate by a group of scholar-activists, academics and practitioners. The group's composition is distinctive in its international character, the range of disciplines applied and the depth of experience and involvement in civic action. The initiative bringing them together stems from a conviction that an array of complex and unresolved socio-political issues has created a critical time in world history. For example, why is people's trust in their politicians, leaders and political systems so low? Why are we now living in an era of 'failed' states and globalized terrorism? Why are gains in quality of life across the world undermined by anxiety about insecurity of livelihoods, pandemics and potentially catastrophic effects of environmental degradation? Why is wealth creation so demonstrably unfair, vulnerable and destabilizing? The range and scale of these and other issues are combining in ways that cannot be resolved (only) by governments and businesses. In fact, in becoming dominant over citizens, governments and businesses are themselves increasingly identified as being part of the problem.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the challenge is to depict a self-determining story of civic-driven change that promotes and 'reclaims' states and markets by and for people instead of being subordinated to their logic.

The ideas and arguments to be found in the pages that follow therefore are about finding, describing and promoting citizen-led solutions to the interconnected dysfunctions of the emerging world order. History testifies to the potency of civic agency towards such ends, as exemplified in successful movements for women's suffrage and against slavery and apartheid. In each case, a prospect of change was imagined that galvanized and propelled civic energy. But we must ensure that these grand achievements do not mask or devalue the years

and years of countless 'invisible' day by day actions people undertake to deal with the challenges they face and in doing so gain more control over their lives and their children's future possibilities. Of particular concern are actions countering poverty, inequity, political marginalization, intolerance and discrimination related to age, gender, sexual preference, belief or ethnic origin. These unwelcome conditions are to be found across the world, in what has become known as the 'global South'.

Central to a story of civic-driven change are understandings of particular terms, such as 'civic', 'citizen and citizenship', 'civil society', 'public' and 'private' realms and spaces, and 'individual' and 'collective' agency. The essays draw on a vast body of writing about these concepts that reflect differences on what they mean for whom, when and why.<sup>2</sup> These terms are defined later, but an important agreement in drafting the essays was to make the authors' own understandings clear. In other words, not to try and produce a false consensus but to be explicit about the contested terrain of ideas and schools of thought that authors rely on. These schools include history, futurism, communitarianism, (neo-)liberal and critical theory and theology, feminism, Gramscian analysis, (post-)structuralism and complexity.<sup>3</sup> Particular links can be found to ongoing debates about the plural nature and deepening of democracies. To all concerned two things were clear. First, an overly academic treatment would be incompatible with the promotion of civic agency that puts a 'self-organization of citizens around inclusive values' as its central message. Consequently, the references and readings relied upon are footnoted with caution and detailed at the end of each essay.

A second agreement was that the perspectives of civic agency to be found in some essays are distinguishable from dominant traditions. Examples are found in the concept of citizen as co-creator and a quality of democracy that is 'developmental', that is a system of governance which fosters citizen's self-organisation around projects that are politically empowering. They are also to be traced in the questioning of a dichotomy

between individual and collectives and public and private spheres. Locally-globalizing conditions demand a release from old, tired polarities and unsatisfactory Third Way types of reconciliation to a more layered, systemic appreciation of citizens' rights and civic actions in a rapidly interconnecting world order. But what might this mean in terms of role and capabilities of states as 'first amongst equals' because of their coercive power and regulatory logic that societies require if rights are to be real? A civic-centric view pushes authors to deal with these questions in new ways.

In addition to a global historical moment, the timing of this publication and related activities stems from a growing worry among some of the key Dutch civic organizations dedicated to international cooperation about the way the whole system of aided change tackles local to global problems. Despite many attempts, reforms in development aid have not produced notable improvements in the system's abilities to achieve its own - oft inflated - goals and objectives. Moreover, official adoption of citizen-inspired principles and development efforts - such as empowerment, participatory planning and self-help initiatives - were co-opted and turned into prescriptive instruments of government aided-development policy.

There have been increasingly sophisticated and comprehensive reviews of why aid does not work well or consistently enough in terms of the goals it sets for itself and 'sells' to the public. However, analysis and reflection on the why, how and results of aid processes are dominated by stories about the roles, responsibilities, competencies and behaviours of governments and of markets. One underlying assumption is that governments are there to guide and bring about change in society and are sufficiently in tune with their populations to know what works best for everyone. Another assumption is that market-based relations work better than other types of interaction in bringing about the conditions and resources needed for human and planetary well-being. Whether or not there is enough evidence to successfully question both these assumptions can be debated. But somehow or other, over time, families and citizens became subsidiary, subordinated actors in understanding how and why societies change for good or ill.

A group of prominent Dutch agencies (among them Hivos, ICCO, Oxfam-Novib, SNV, Cordaid, and IKV-Pax Christi) took the view that it was time to redress this situation and to explore the merits of citizen-led solutions by rethinking change in societies in ways that take people's efforts into account in their own right. In other words, not to characteristically or overly rely on making government or business activity more people-centred and participatory - valuable as that might be - but to think afresh about the nature and function of constructive and transformative civic action. This thinking exercise would enable these and other organizations to re-evaluate their history and roles and reassess relationships established with their partners and peers across the world. In addition, the ini-

tiative may also contribute to reflections within donor countries on their inspirations, history and prospects for tackling their own problems.

There was a shared belief in the value of establishing an additional perspective on the process of transformative change (previously called 'development'). Such a standpoint would build on and communicate to many audiences the growing basis of knowledge and examples about what works, what doesn't, and what is promising and problematic when civic action is at the forefront of change. In so doing, it could counter or rebalance a prevailing view that market-driven growth and wealth creation are the pre-eminent (or only) vehicles for ending poverty and that competent, accountable governments are reliable producers, guides and guardians of change that make society work better for everyone.

In sum, a starting point was that the numbers, types and connection between inequalities, crises, vulnerabilities and instability across the world are not matched by the (global) institutions and types of change required to deal with them. But people are not passive in responding to the challenges they encounter in life. The mission, therefore, is one of creating a well-founded understanding of change in society that results from citizen-led solutions. We faced the task of giving flesh to this idea of 'citizen-led' or 'civic-driven' change, and its problem-solving potential generated by civic action. We were aware that this rethinking exercise could not be based on a single type of action or activity, nor on a particular region or specific issues resulting in one particular narrative.

We had to build on the rich diversity of civic action in an historical perspective, which has been generated by a 1001 different narratives. The challenge was to recapture these experiences into a coherent, compact and accessible analysis and message.

Hence it was decided in 2007 to invest in a robust and innovative process to identify a civic-driven narrative (or call it a story) of how societies change due to civic action. Then to communicate this story in such a way that those interested in doing so could reflect on their work to refine and, in day to day practice, better attain the future they want.

The Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague offered a suitable venue for this effort. Its founding values correspond to an image of societies around the world that are just and equitable. It is renowned for post-graduate development studies that permeate the institution with an international perspective and engagements. Thousands of alumni have become civic actors in over a hundred countries. Staff with knowledge, experience and reputation in action-research and policy-oriented studies about non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and civil society more broadly, was interested in working on such an effort. In addition, the institute and its leadership are respected within the Dutch development community as a 'neutral' ground for collaboration between organizations that might contend in other fields.<sup>4</sup>

From the outset, it was clear to the organizations supporting this initiative that only drawing on the Netherlands' development experience - rich as it is - would be too narrow a grounding for a robust narrative and a citizen-centred account of bringing about change to society. A broader canvas of international views and experience would be required. Also apparent was that building a compelling civic framework could not ignore or falsely 'harmonize' the contending viewpoints and arguments to be seen in North-South and other dialogues about change in and of society, aided or otherwise. Furthermore, making the heterogeneity of ideas and arguments explicit would help counter the tendency to treat central concepts, such as citizenship, as unproblematic and civil society as benign. In doing so, organizations interested in a civic-centred view of change would be better able to consider their own position on enduring debates.

Consequently, a range of academics, practitioners and scholar activists were invited to form a core group to think through the substance of civic-driven change. The resulting set of individuals are exceptional in terms of backgrounds, disciplines, cultures, first languages and points of view. Rather than traditional 'chapters', written outputs would be treated as personal 'essays' that are intentionally not 'edited' to a strictly uniform style or format. The resulting 'unevenness' reflects a respect for differences that is a signal feature of a civic approach to change. The Civic-Driven Change (CDC) process was also novel in not predetermining and defining what should be produced, nor being constrained or directed to simply deal with the Netherlands' context and its current development concerns. The relative openness of this method was itself a challenge to find what was, and was not, common ground and to understand differences and why they matter. The end of this essay summarizes what emerged in terms of characteristics of civic-driven change and areas of disagreement.

### Constructing a Civic-Driven Narrative

The following essays provide a comprehensive range of cases and analyses that establish major elements of civic-driven change. The first three elaborate on a critical, foundational issue of being explicit about the use of language, which is intimately tied to histories, contexts, interests and information sources that give words a meaning to people as agents of their own change. The second theme links essays five to nine in terms of practical civic action towards greater citizens' influence over forces affecting their lives. The role of outside actors is questioned, which requires both greater attention to risks and more care in terms of assuming similarities in what citizenship means. The other essays concentrate on civic agency directed towards democratization. Both themes are connected by attention to the nature and expressions of power. The concluding essay interprets and applies the body of work in terms of what it might mean for agencies involved in development cooperation.

The essays, by Evelina Dagnino, Philomena Mwaura and Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron respectively, offer important foundational features for creating a civic-driven view that play out throughout the rest of the texts. Evelina Dagnino argues for two important enabling conditions for a civic-driven narrative to have practical meaning. First, is to recognize that the notion of civic-driven change is moot under conditions where the 'right to have rights' is denied. In such situations, the construction of the civic itself may become the change that we are looking for. Second, is to be critically attentive to what terms mean to those using them, for 'multiple interpretations of the same terms hinder an understanding of what a civic-driven paradigm actually stands for and implies for action'. With illustrations from Brazil - with similarities throughout Latin America - she illustrates in detail how over some twenty-five years, language (on citizenship for example) has been reinterpreted to serve the ends of contending 'political projects'. This term refers, amongst others, to beliefs, interests, representations and economic agendas that lie behind the forces and pressures to shape political configurations in particular, intentional ways.

In the context of resistance against a post-military coup in 1964, Evelina Dagnino's essay draws first on the experience of a *favelado* movement in Campinas, a town in Brazil, organized in 1979. Through a series of struggles, starting with the provision of water, to eventually claiming their right to use their land to live on, inhabitants of the shanty town asserted their right to political participation. Despite initial defeat in the legislature, their actions eventually gained the support of the local Mayor. Typical of social movements in the late nineteen seventies and eighties in Brazil, the People's Assembly's struggles for rights and citizenship contributed to redefine and enlarge previous meanings of citizenship in the country. A new Constitution in 1988 expressed these struggles in the formulation of democracy as a 'participatory project' with the clear articulation of the responsibilities that a state must fulfil for all as a universal right.

A second story, however, shows the emergence of new definitions of citizenship and the role of civil society as the neo-liberal project found its way into Brazil onwards from 1989. As the government became increasingly committed to transferring public responsibilities to civil society, NGOs became ideal partners in this new project. In the process, civic action, agency and citizenship have become redefined in directions that distance them from the very idea of inalienable rights and citizens struggling for them.

Her contribution for creating a civic narrative is important because it draws attention to how relations between a citizen and a state and amongst citizens are labelled and communicated. It illustrates in whose interest certain interpretations become dominant and normative in terms of people's rights and the government duties they imply. In doing so the ambivalence of citizenship as a category for exclusion as well as inclusion must not be ignored. In addition, she identifies a 'perverse confluence'

4 in the language applied to citizens' rights. When interpreted and articulated by neo-liberal political elites, the term 'citizenship' effectively legitimizes the unburdening of a government's duties towards its polity. Doing so recasts people who are poor and marginalized from identities as rights holders and legitimate political claimants to beneficiaries with needs and the proper object of private welfare and philanthropy. In a subtle way, statehood is being redefined as is citizenship in its wake.

The essay by Philomena Mwaura introduces the concepts of world view, faith and religion as fundamental to civic agency which impacts in several ways. First it influences a person's identity, values and predispositions towards (him/her)self and others that may or may not be civic in the sense of respect for inclusion and difference. Second, it co-conditions the ideas and images of a future that people aspire to. Drawing on African and wider comparative experience, in her analysis the critical feature informing both aspects of agency is a person's world view and the role of religion, belief and spirituality in its formation. Belief systems - and political reactions to them - are endemic. It is simply fanciful to separate out or deny a 'spiritual' element in how people see others and what they think the world and their lives should be like and why. In her reading, a peoples' normative world view defines the way they go about health and education, their engagement in politics, the way they understand power, the way power is exercised, the way people understand their leaders, and the way they participate in political processes.

A further tie between faith and civic agency is found in the way people consider rights and obligations. What do belief perspectives say about our own or state responsibilities as opposed to God's responsibility? Does this lead to passiveness or a calling and preparedness to act? How is leadership understood? Should you be subservient or can you, should you, must you, argue against your leaders?

The case illustrating the faith-driven features of agency draws on Kenya's political history from the Colonial era to the present day. The interplay between ethnicity, religious adherence and political engagement is detailed at a practical level of changes in regimes and, hence, winners and losers of control over public resources. More profoundly, however, the explication is located in a framing of how leadership is regarded as an intermediary between human beings and the rest of creation. In this sense, religion makes Africa's political realm sacred or enchanted because of its association with moral performance as a human within a moral philosophy of *ubuntu*, or a collective self, and lived connections to spirits entwined with the natural realm. Power pivots around successful claimants to authority associated with this spiritual world view.

Consequently, the supposed duality between secularism and religion does not correspond to the lived reality of many. Institutionalized belief has a long tail into today's common separation between church and state. States may be secular in many instances, but politics is

not. The distinction needs to be recognized in thinking and practice. Along with trends towards apolitical agency, secularization must not simply be assumed because technocracy may dictate how a state supposedly works. Obviously, world views are informed by many things - experiences, jobs, economic status and so on. But an explanation of civic-driven change must not fall into the trap of denying an underlying, albeit not overtly articulated, spiritual grounding to how citizenship is lived and the futures that are considered desirable. This calls, for example, to understand contexts and motivations for action in a more profound way than is commonly the case. In particular it draws attention to the information that people rely on to act. This topic - the access to information - is a central concern for the essay by Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron.

Gaining knowledge and critical understanding is a precondition for informed civic agency. An example from Mozambique takes us to a major critique of the way in which information and communication are confused and (mis)used to shape civic consciousness, dispositions and world view. In part, failings in development communication arise from a lack of adequate expertise and sound strategies within aid agencies. But non-developmental outcomes also stem from use of communication to serve the self-promotional ends of development institutions and individuals. Communication for transformation and civic agency is therefore, according to Gumucio-Dagron, too important to be left to development planners! A detailed review of communication in terms of power, profit, propaganda and privilege points to the 'verticality' of current development communication and the need for a counter-approach. This journey questions a common assumption that 'mass' media is a useful concept for understanding or applying development communication efforts.

A different approach would recognize the roots of communication in access, sharing and participation - a horizontal dialogue with two-way exchange - rather than a unidirectional process to fill a person's 'knowledge bank' in uncritical ways warned about by Evelina Dagnino. In this alternative view horizontal communication can help reveal structures of disempowerment and can be employed to counter anti-democratic action that is illustrated by a case of miners' radio in Bolivia.

Drawing on results of the 2006 World Conference of Communications for Development (WCCD) Gumucio's essay argues for six steps that will reduce the separation between communication and its ability to contribute to transformative social change. In doing so, he points out that the findings and resolutions directed towards official agencies could be equally applied to many constituents of civic society that communicate in ways that are not consistent with a transformative agenda. In both instances, the problem of accountability looms large. Perhaps modelled on entities tracking international institutions like the World Bank, Gumucio-Dagron argues for the establishment of 'observatories' that pay specific attention to what is communicated by who, how and why in the name of development.

The second theme of practical civic action starts with the essay by Nilda Bullain. Her essay introduces critical points of debate about the roles of outsiders that are partly illustrated by her encounter as a student with gypsies living in a ghetto near a village close to the Ukrainian border. This work occurred in the mid-eighties - prior to Hungary's post-Soviet political reform. Here, the recognition and allocation of rights, responsibilities and duties played out around the provision of potable water by local government. In this instance, the gypsy community continued to wait for the village government to act when, with their own efforts the trenches could be dug and the already available piping laid. Fellow students started work on the trenches. Eventually, the people themselves joined in, completed the work and celebrated their achievement. In Harry Boyte's terms described later, this is public work in action. But from Evelina Dagnino's analysis, is this not continued disempowerment from within, shown in the lack of political self-organization to make the government fulfil its obligations? Recognizing this contention is critical for a civic-driven paradigm that is explicit about how the rights and responsibilities of citizenship are viewed within a state and in the values embedded in a legal framework. The point Nilda Bullain stresses is that the development of 'power within' that is represented by civic agency and values also calls for greater attention to the personal and collective responsibilities that come with the rights of citizenship.

In a similar vein, in the (Eastern European) context with which she is most familiar, a freer operation of markets as an agent of social change is called for because of its effects in reducing opportunities for rent-seeking, corruption and bribery. In Nilda Bullain's view and experience, protectionist states that do not adequately regulate personal accumulation on the one hand and over-regulate markets for the good of the whole on the other reflect and induce values and behaviours that are uncivic and therefore anti-democratic. It is the ability for all to exert civic agency in its full sense that determines the mix that is appropriate at a given place and time.

A common trait of governments is to be uncomfortable with itinerant populations groups, such as gypsies in Europe and pastoralists in Africa - their loyalty is in doubt. For such groups and for migrants, gaining citizenship may not be straightforward and is subject to different philosophies that laws reflect. Rajesh Tandon's essay described below argues that, in ancient pre-democratic history, initially citizenship was understood as a set of virtuous moral behaviours required of those exercising power for the good of the whole community. Subsequently, the notion and principle of civic and citizenship evolved to a 'vertical' legal attribute confirmed by a state on citizens where loyalty and compliance with laws and edicts of rulers was the norm. The point is that an assumption that citizenship in law and practice corresponds to some universal agreement or philosophy is ahistorical. This condition calls for a contextspecific understanding, particularly between articulations about a society's deep moral values and its expectations of allegiance.

A final lesson from the case described by Nilda Bullain is to question a legitimate and appropriate role for 'outsiders' in bringing about change for others. External interventions implicitly bring with them an image of a different situation to the one that exists. This desired future for others must be made explicit along the lines set out by Evelina Dagnino. The 'political project' that the new future represents must be spelt out by those promoting change for others - meanings must be properly understood, shared or contested. In the last analysis, it is the critical judgment of the people 'whose lives should change' about the real intentions and the merits of outsiders which determine what is or is not development. It is incumbent on external agents to be straightforward about intentions to influence values, culture and attitudes that, for example, justify discrimination or inequity.

The question of risk and opportunity in citizen action is an often neglected dimension of external intervention addressed by Shirin Rai. She describes a case of a government and United Nations sponsored programme intended to empower women. The means for doing so relied on local village workers - *sathins* - as catalysts in building collective forums where issues confronting women could be debated in a public arena and remedies sought. The course of the programme brought *sathins* into conflict with existing hierarchies leading to violent reactions including their rape and attempts at banishment. Analysis of this case introduces additional elements of significance for a paradigm of civic agency.

One is to be clear about who carries what (types of) risk in promoting social change. Mapping of existing power relations and interests is a sensible starting point. The example shows, however, that some sources and dimensions of risk, and for who, only emerge as the process unfolds. Dealing with 'power unveiling' calls for insight, agility and contingency. Second, it is also unsafe to make assumptions about the homogeneity of government institutions that lie, for example, under a supposed agenda of modernization. It seems prudent in the practice of civic agency to start with the premise of multiple agendas and conflicts of interest and turf within and between government agencies at all levels of public administration. Third, people's civic actions are products of past experience that constantly update an inner world view. Experience is set against aspirations for a different, imagined, situation - in this case greater freedom for women to act - that is then judged in terms of the practicalities, cost, risks and opportunities for achievement. In other words in civic agency, past, future and present are always somewhere in play. Understanding what is going on in this triad deepens an appreciation of civic motivation and intention spoken of earlier.

Finally, Shirin Rai's example illustrates unexpected ways in which one event - the rape of a *sathin* Bhanwari Devi - can trigger a structural change through legal adjudication and rulings. In this instance, further accumulating evidence of contradictions between a state's words and deeds and wider pressures for change could not be

6 contained or denied at acceptable cost. The Supreme Court spoke in favour of greater protection for women when gaining employment. But the pathways to reaching this 'tipping point' - and the role of Bhanwari Devi as a public interest test case - were certainly not in the minds of those originally initiating the empowerment programme. This suggests that civic agency will be subject to uncertainties and opportunities that grow in size with the scale and time of change involved.

Adding to the critical understanding of citizenship being defined in different ways by different political subjects, Harry Boyte brings attention to concrete ways of pursuing civic agency. He defines civic agency as people's capacities, individually and collectively, to be agents of their lives and of development - to alter their circumstances and to work with others across differences on common problems. He argues that while civic agency was circumscribed across the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it remained alive in community organizing and popular education. To illustrate this argument, he draws from such traditions in the United States, South Africa, and Sweden.

Organizing and popular education have normative dimensions, infused with values of inclusion, equality, cooperation, work, dignity, and freedom. But they begin 'where people are at', not where organizers think they should be. Organizing and popular education develop concepts, methods, and learning environments as 'free spaces' in which people attain a more inclusive understanding of themselves and 'the people' generally as they develop confidence, skills, and public life. Both traditions also begin with the cultural life of communities.

In identifying forces working against agency, Boyte focuses attention on 'creeping technocracy', or control over institutions and communities by outside experts who - despite the best of intentions - have little understanding of or respect for people's capacities and knowledge. Technocracy has eroded civic life in the United States and South Africa, he argues, as people have developed dependency on service providers, leaders and outside experts. The technocratic pattern of expert control extends even to civic action itself; shaping what he calls mobilizing, in which people follow a script written by someone else. By contrast, community organizing and popular education develop people's capacities for public action across differences; in what Boyte argues can be usefully described as 'public work'. Public work most often begins with concrete issues close to home such as electricity, water, houses, crime, jobs. But public work can also generate broad cultural change. Boyte gives an example from New York of a low income community group that forged a partnership on a large scale housing development with a reluctant city government, and the example of a large university in Indiana that changed its relation with neighbourhoods through public work. He uses systems theory to emphasize the potential in these stories of culture shaping institutions such as the higher education and the media to build civic agency and to develop new 'transformative leaders'.

An important consequence for understanding public work as an attribute of citizenship is that it is not 'located' in a particular setting such as civil society. Rather, public work integrates energies across different borders and boundaries. Boyte argues that public work and civic agency point to the need for a shift in paradigms about democracy, citizenship, and the role of government. In a public work approach, 'developmental democracy' builds on but goes beyond representative democracy and participatory democracy. The citizen is best seen as co-creator of a democratic society, involving productive civic activity in a variety of realms. And government is best conceived as a catalyst and enabler of civic energies, not as the centre of the democratic universe.

The themes of citizenship, democratization and spirituality are reflected and deepened in the essay by Rajesh Tandon. He points to newspaper articles on small scale, civic actions in India that are relegated to fill-in human interest sections and middle pages. Front pages are devoted to the protest of Buddhist Monks in Burma and an anniversary of struggles over government sequestration of land in West Bengal that cost protesters their lives from police bullets. This reinforces Harry Boyte's arguments for recognizing the value and multiplying the instances of people's public work. But it also draws attention to a common headline-catching fixation on civic action as oppositional rather than constructive. The latter is portrayed into the public mind as the positive work of governments - social service delivery - and businesses in job creation. This opens up a discussion about citizen action in relation to 'thin' and 'thick' democracy. The former relies on casting votes and concern for protecting individual rights to an active citizenship that is 'horizontal' towards common rights and responsibilities as well as vertical towards the state.

Two further issues add to what a civic-driven framework should take on board. One is the problem of aggregation of local efforts so that they are more than the sum of their parts. Small may no longer be beautiful if it cannot connect and add up to much more. Are, as some might argue, strong leaders who can convene and articulate the collective agenda an answer to coalescing self-driven efforts or a contradiction in terms? An associated aspect is that the time frames required for civic action to bring about structural and transformative changes may be inter-generational. They will not lead to the dramatic breakthroughs that many 'agents of change' like NGOs would like to see in their lifetime and may have to be content with a small supportive role in deepening civic engagement.

Rajesh Tandon also points to the serious efforts required to recover the public sphere from its progressive commercialization. There are increasing examples of this happening in relation to local government and its social accountability. Civic agency is responsible for a less compliant, demand driver towards government agencies and the politics of the local. Where this complements the old patrician politics of parties and votes, self-generation may result. Where it does not, conflict and subjugation are in play. This poses the issue of assessing the risks involved.

Teivo Teivainen takes elements of previous essays to scale in the sense of the challenges and dilemmas for civic agency when the perspective is transnational, global and political. Drawing on the World Social Forum (WSF), four important discussions ensue. Corresponding to and furthering Evelina Dagnino's cautionary concern with interpretation of concepts and labels, one discussion focuses on the need for a new language with which to explore civic agency that is not tied or reduced to a conceptual baggage of parties and state 'capture' as the determining locus of political action. In this, he echoes Harry Boyte in terms of moving beyond the confines of party political mobilization to self-organization in a form of democracy that is developmental. The search is for new ways of thinking about and doing politics that is still embryonic in its contours and ramifications.

A second strand of discussion involves the degree of openness of an 'open space' premise of the WSF in terms of who is (not) eligible to participate. In doing so, a secular stance is articulated that recognizes humanity but has no formal space for confessional spirituality explored in the essay by Philomena Mwaura. Open space is also a site of contention around whether or not the WSF is a platform for advancing an agenda to make 'another world possible', or simply must remain an opportunity for encounters and self-orchestrated collaborations that are increasingly horizontal, aided by the rapid expansion of communications suggested in the essay by Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron. But the 'inclusion' of the WSF issue of authority and hierarchy as a 'natural' product of 'managing' scale and aggregation looms large.

Of added significance is making explicit the extent to which an increasing economic power of capitalism better exposes its political nature and that of the global institutions which act as transmission vehicles. This illumination invites greater opportunity for requiring business to be a site of civic agency and, accordingly, accountable for the good of the whole. Paying corporate taxes or investing money in corporate social responsibility (CSR) does not buy off this responsibility for firms any more than personal tax does for individuals. Nevertheless, WSF experience shows that it is virtually impossible to organize big non-market based civic events in an all-pervading market environment. Establishing an uncommodified material base for civic action at scale is highly problematic.

A significant paradox experienced by the feminist movement and arising from civic agency at scale demonstrated in the WSF is to remain 'structureless' in order to avoid the 'iron law of oligarchy'.<sup>5</sup> However, a result of being unstructured is that too few mandated rules place organizers in a 'closed' undemocratic space. Can the issue of internal democracy for civic agency be left to chance or to uncritical trust in the 'political enlightenment' of those involved?

The lack of a global action agenda emanating from the Forum feeds negative media reporting, relying as it does on equating the processes involved with the World Economic Forum and expectations of newsworthy decla-

rations from political summits. To say that this reaction misinterprets the WSF is not a very helpful rejoinder. More to the point is for the intelligent use of new communications technology and channels to promote civic views and connections.

The final discussion points towards arguments in other essays. One, is that civic agency is not located in a 'sector'. The democratization of corporate institutions is much part of a civic agenda as is that of government, family or self-organized associations. Another is that the politics of civic agency call for rethinking the institutional arrangements of global governance from below, but with realism. For, at any scale, human agency stems from an imagination of the future informed by experience of the past and tested against the practicality and risks of action today.

### (Un)common Ground

The essays create common ground about civic-driven change as a force for attaining or reclaiming meaningful forms of democracy. That is, the creation of political systems in which citizens are not subordinated but exert real influence over forces that impact on their lives. There are also critical areas of difference. This hardly is surprising. For, as should be clear by this stage, the core concepts involved in a civic-driven story of change are products of contending political positions and perspectives which reflect world reality. Therefore, these essays are only an initial trigger of a broader effort of formulating how citizens can contribute to transformative change processes. An intended value in making differences explicit is to ensure that readers have a landscape against which to see their own implicit or explicit position on the attribution of cause for problems of concern as well as the means needed to deal with them. This concluding section therefore summarizes common and disputed aspects of civic-driven change.

A shared perspective on civic agency is to be found in the following propositions and characteristics:

1. *A paradigm (or narrative) of civic-driven change* needs to be explained within the 'political project' it aspires to, making explicit the meaning of core concepts.
2. *CDC is intentional in acting* to bring about a transformative change in society towards an imagined new situation. By definition, citizens will have different ideas, images and priorities for what transformative change should be.
3. *CDC relies on a civic agency as a normative* pro-social value-based human predisposition. This behaviour should be based on respect for differences between people and a concern for society and its environment as a whole.
4. *Civic agency is a self-directed ability and right of citizens* to shape their lives and circumstances as well as solve common problems through individual and collective action. Political ideologies and systems are crucial in determining if, how and to what extent this right is understood and

exercised. Hence, civic agency and civic-driven change are tied to democratization.

5. *The 'civic' in CDC recognizes people acting as citizens* with rights and obligations in relation to states with duties as guarantors of rights. CDC is therefore premised on the outcome of struggles to attain and maintain a minimum respect for a people's 'right to have rights' and a say in what future a state should be 'mandated' to reach.

6. *Citizenship is a legal, socio-political identity* accorded by a state to members of its polity. Legal grounding is therefore vital to see how citizenship is understood, including an implicit or explicit philosophy of being a human person. Citizenship is far from a universal identity enjoyed by all people. Nor is it necessarily a significant point of reference in people's lives.

7. Derived from citizenship, *civic agency is not located within one institutional sector or realm*. Both civic and uncivic or undemocratic agencies can be found in all walks of life and the social structures that people create: families, businesses, government, political parties and civil society. Civic-driven change does occur and can be further developed in all of them.

The problematic areas for a framework of civic-driven change stem from enduring contentions around a number of issues and questions that call for conscious positions to be taken.

1. What does the trend towards the sharing of a state's duties and responsibilities with citizens - sometimes labelled 'co-production' - mean? Is this an unburdening of a state, which subtly redefines citizenship away from fundamental and universal rights towards identities which disempower?

2. Is the implied co-evolution of states, citizenship and political projects inevitably one of long term subordination to a competitive, market-driven model of human relations?

3. Citizens are equal before the law but the practice is often very different, especially in the South: class differences, ethnic diversity, language barriers, gender-based exclusion, and many other forms of segregation undermine the potential consensus and coherence of the citizenry. Hence civic-driven change is often not exempt from tension, conflict and violence.

These issues are further analysed in the concluding chapter (10) that suggests what CDC might mean for agencies involved in aided change. It addresses several questions: why bother to create a story about civic-driven changes in society? In whose interest is such a narrative? How can we ensure that such a story is owned by those who could make use of it? And what might this mean for what they do and how?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rischard, J. (2002) *High Noon: 20 Global Problems 20 Years to solve Them*. Basic Books: London.

<sup>2</sup> Of particular complementary value is the work of and publications by the Citizenship, Participation and Accountability Centre at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex. <http://www.drc-citizenship.org>

<sup>3</sup> Key texts can be found in the readings.

<sup>4</sup> The role of Context International Cooperation in co-designing and facilitating face to face sessions in the process is gratefully acknowledged.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Michels (1915) *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*. The Free Press: New York.

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