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# *Corporate Sustainability The Civil Society Perspective*

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# What is civil society?

Political idea, autonomous sphere , difficult to define

Organizationally:

NGOs

large to small to grassroots organizations

Networks

Individuals

Characterized by ‘mission’ objective, but can incorporate multiple types of models and structures.

# What characterizes civil society



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- High degree of mission orientation
- Often high degree of idealism
- Struggle to sustain efforts
- Often high economic dependency on other stakeholders
- Ranging from critical role to service delivery
- Structure and degrees of freedom greatly determined on broader socio-political structures
- Often regulated to lesser or greater degree



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# Popular `conceptions' of civil society

- Not professional
- Not research oriented
- Not accountable
- Not transparent
- Unreasonable
- Persistent trouble makers
- Inflexible and impractical

*Both 'sides' seem to have a very blanket view of each other*



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# In India civil society has..

- Vacillating relationship with the state
- Substantial degree of state control
- Difficult relationship with the Corporate Sector
- Good relationship with society and the media at large



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# General view of corporate sector by civil society

- Corporate sector is an ‘interest’ group
- Blindly profit oriented - ‘does not care’
- Engages in side-deals with the state
- Can buy the system out if inconvenient
- Uncaring about ‘human’ values and ‘society’
- Arrogant – believe they are the future
- Despises/dislikes or uses civil society
- Lip service to ‘democracy’ and ‘citizenship’
- Does not understand ‘civil society’
- Uninformed about histories of ‘change’



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*Corporate sector has institutional strengths, capital, legitimacy and accepted operational space*

*Civil Society has knowledge of many types, commitment, persistence, multiple modes of engagement, political understandings, and negotiated space.*



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# The Challenge of Working Together



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# Role of partnerships

“ We now understand that both business and society stand to benefit from working together. And more and more we are realizing that it is only by mobilizing the corporate sector that we can make significant progress...” Kofi Anan



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# Basis for Partnerships

- Trust
- Opportunity to create greater impact
- Mutual respect for roles
- Accountability



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# Need

- Business is primary driver for economic development
- Falls short of social and environmental responsibility
- Sustainability issues unresolved



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# Types

## Partnerships:

- Delivering service on the ground
- Creating markets for communities
- Joint implementation of projects
- Joint research
- Resorting
- In house sustainability partnerships

# Barriers

- Are there any social benchmarks for business?
- How does one deal with immoral and unethical behavior?
- Vulnerability to reputation, legitimacy to function
- Greenwash?

# CSR



- Market benefits with CSR
- Corporate citizenship need CSOs as strong partners.
- Strategic partnership (different from philanthropic relationships) (production capacity of business and social organizing capacity of civil society)
- CSR – business practices, ems, human resource policy..



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# Questions

- Are corporations able to see themselves as ‘citizens?’
- Are corporations committed to ‘democracy?’
- Are corporations ready to pay the price of the above?
- Is there commitment at the top?
- Is the state equally fair to civil society and corporations?
- Is there space (or need) for respectful conversations?

# Some Examples of working together





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- The ideal is for a just, fair and equitable society with equal opportunity for all.
- The struggle is to achieve this dynamic balance
- Value based engagement needs to underlie every action.