

CIVIL SOCIETY & GOVERNANCE

IMPLICATIONS FOR AID

a DevNet / NZAID symposium
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND, 29–30 NOVEMBER, 2007

DevNet/NZAID Symposium on Civil Society and Governance

2007

Participant Information Pack

Funded by



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Acknowledgements

This event has been made possible through the generous funding of NZAID – New Zealand’s International Development Agency. The DevNet Steering Committee would like to thank NZAID not only for their support of this event but also for their ongoing support of DevNet and of DevNet events.

About Your Hosts

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DevNet

The Aotearoa New Zealand International Development Studies Network (DevNet) was established to link people and organisations in New Zealand involved and interested in the broad field of development. DevNet's aim is to facilitate the exchange of ideas, information and research between and amongst Development Studies staff and students in tertiary institutions, and key stakeholders in development. Such stakeholders include: aid and development NGOs, private sector development practitioners, and government (particularly NZAID). DevNet's key activities include DevNet conferences and symposia; the DevNet website; and regular DevNet email updates.

Overall direction of DevNet is set at the National Forum, which meets at the time of DevNet Conferences (every two years) and is open to anyone to attend. Ongoing governance of DevNet takes place via its steering committee, which meets every 3-4 months. Universities each have one representative on the steering committee, as do NZAID, the Council for International Development (CID) and Dev-Zone.

For more information about DevNet visit the DevNet website: www.devnet.org.nz

NZAID

NZAID is the New Zealand Government's international aid and development agency. The agency is responsible for delivering New Zealand's Official Development Assistance (ODA) and for advising Ministers on development assistance policy and operations. NZAID is a semi-autonomous body within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT).

Nga Hoe Tuputupu-mai-tawhiti – the paddles that bring growth from afar – is the Maori name for NZAID. This evocative name reflects New Zealand's Pacific heritage and the partnership principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.

The Government created NZAID in July 2002 to give a distinctive profile and new focus to New Zealand's Official Development Assistance (ODA) Programme. Since the agency's formation, eliminating poverty has been central to NZAID's mission, with a regional focus on the Pacific, reflecting the Government's commitment to be a good international citizen and neighbour.

You can find out more about NZAID from their website: www.nzaid.govt.nz

About the Symposium Organisers

The symposium organising committee is comprised of the following people:

Sally Jackman – NZAID

Tony Banks – NZAID

Maria McMillan – The Development Resource Centre

Rae Julian – The Council For International Development

John Overton – Victoria University

Terence Wood – DevNet/The Development Resource Centre

Also involved in organising the event are:

Mary O'Regan – facilitator
O'Regan & Lynch Consultants

Jennifer Harris – event organiser.

About the Event

The 2007 symposium on Civil Society and Governance is the first such event to be held in partnership between DevNet and NZAID. It is envisaged that, in the future, symposia will be held in alternate years from DevNet conferences.

The 2007 symposium is being held on the topic of 'Civil Society and Governance: implications for aid' and will take place on the 29th and 30th of November at the Kingsgate Hotel Portland in Thorndon, Wellington.

Civil society, and its role in improving governance, was chosen as the topic for the 2007 symposium in acknowledgement of the prominence that has been afforded to this subject in development discourse in recent years.

In order to help us negotiate our way through a complex and contested subject, the symposium has been designed as a structured event involving keynote talks, panel discussions, speeches and workshops.

The structure of the symposium has been informed by five key questions.

1. What do we mean when we use the terms governance and civil society? How do our definitions impact on our discussions?
2. What factors and frameworks provide a global context for critical thinking and action on civil society and improving governance?
3. What role does civil society play in supporting good governance?
4. What are the challenges confronting civil society in developing countries?
5. How can donors, civil society organisations (CSOs), practitioners and academics act to help minimise/overcome these challenges?

Broadly speaking these questions are designed to carry us from theory to practice and to leave us with new ideas which we can then take away and use in the work we do.

About the Event – Event Programme

Day	Start/Finish Time	Session	Event	Who	Where
Day 1 - 29 November	8:00am - 9:00am		Registration and Welcome Coffee		
	9:00am - 9:30am	Welcome	Mihimihi and welcome	Martin Wikaira (MFAT) & Don Clarke (NZAIID)	Main Hall
	9:30am - 10:00am	Opening Talk	Defining the terms of the discussion - introductory talk	John Overton (Victoria University)	Main Hall
	10:00am - 10:30am		Morning tea		
	10:30am - 12:00pm	Workshops 1	Defining the terms of the discussion: what do we mean when we use the terms civil society and governance? How will our definitions impact on our discussions at the event?	<i>Facilitators</i> Group 1: Mary O'Regan Group 2: Andrew McGregor Group 3: Regina Scheyvens Group 4: Eleanor Doig Chair Report Back: Mary O'Regan	Room 1 Room 2 Room 3 Room 5 Main Hall
	12:00pm - 1:00pm		Lunch		
	1:00pm - 2:30pm	Short Talks 1	Mapping the global context for critical thinking and action on civil society and governance	<i>Speakers</i> Michael Edwards (Ford Foundation) Vicki Poole (NZAIID) Rae Julian (CID) Materoa Dodd (Waikato University) Session Chair: Mary O'Regan	Main Hall
	2:30pm - 3:00pm		Afternoon Tea		
	3:00pm - 4:30pm	Keynote Talk 1	Civil Society's impact on governance; government's impact on civil society	Michael Edwards Session Chair: Rae Julian (CID)	Main Hall
	4:30pm - 5:30pm	Panel 1	Critical Issues in civil society and governance: different perspectives?	<i>Panellists</i> Peter Swain (VSA) Beverly Turnbull (NZAIID) David Robinson (ICNL) Representative of FSPI Session Chair: Mary O'Regan	Main Hall
	5:30pm onwards		Snack food and socialising in the Portland bar/restaurant		
Day 2 - 30 November	8:30am-9:00am		Tea/Coffee		
	9:00am - 10:00am	Keynote Talk 2	The challenges faced by civil society	Kumi Naidoo (CMCUS) Chair: Don Clarke (NZAIID)	Main Hall
	10:00am - 10:30am		Morning tea		
	10:30am - 11:30am	Short Talks 2	Narratives: the challenges that confront us in our work	<i>Speakers</i> Dreshna Anjinaiya & Blandine Boulekone (TI) David Green (AusAID) Samantha Hung (NZAIID) Session Chair: Mary O'Regan	Main Hall
	11:30am -12:30pm	Workshops 2	The challenges that confront us in our work	<i>Facilitators</i> Group 1: Mary O'Regan Group 2: Jo Spratt Group 3: Andrew McGregor Group 4: Eleanor Doig	Room 1 Room 3 Room 4 Room 5
	12:30pm - 1:30pm		Lunch		
	1:30pm - 2:30pm	Panel 2	Putting it into Practice: what can be done to support civil society in promoting better governance	<i>Panellists</i> Gerard Prinsen (Massey) Cameron Cowan (NZAIID) Representative of Oxfam NZ Jone Dakavula (CCF Fiji) Session Chair: Mary O'Regan	Main Hall
	2:30pm - 3:00pm		Afternoon Tea		
	3:00pm - 4:30pm	Workshops 3	Changing practice - what needs to be done	<i>Facilitators</i> Group CSO 1: Mary O'Regan Group CSO 2: Jo Spratt Group Acad/Other: J Benter-Lynch Donor Agency: TBC Report Back Chair: Mary O'Regan	Room 1 Room 3 Room 4 Room 5 Main Hall
	4:30pm - 5:00pm	Concluding Talk	Keynote Response	Kumi Naidoo (CMCUS) Chair: Mary O'Regan	Main Hall
	5:00pm - 5:30pm	Closing Session		John Overton & Mary O'Regan	Main Hall

About the Sessions

Day 1 – November 29

Registration: 8:30 – 9:00am

Registration will take place in the Portland Hotel conference facilities (on the first floor of the hotel).

Registration will be accompanied by tea and coffee.

Mihimihi and Welcome: 9:00am – 9:30am

Martin Wikaira (Deputy Director: Maori Policy Unit) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade will open the event with a mihimihi (greeting in the Maori language). Don Clarke of NZAID will then welcome participants and introduce the event.

Opening talk: 9:30am – 10:00am

John Overton (Director of the Graduate Programme in Development Studies at Victoria University) will introduce participants to the subject. His talk will introduce the subject matter and lead into the following session on definitions.

Morning Tea: 10:00am-10:30am

Morning tea will be held in the Portland restaurant on the ground floor.

Workshops 1: 10:30am – 12:00pm

Defining the terms of the discussion: what do we mean when we use the terms civil society and governance? How do our definitions impact on our discussions here?

In this workshop the main group will break into four smaller groups. You can find your group number on the sticker on the front of your symposium handout. The groups, their facilitators and their venue are detailed below.

Workshop Groups		
Group	Facilitator	Location
1	Mary O'Regan	Room 1
2	Andrew McGregor	Room 2
3	Regina Scheyvens	Room 3
4	Eleanor Doig	Room 5

The groups will workshop for one hour. At the end of the workshop the groups will join together to report back (briefly) on the key points of their discussions.

For the workshops the groups will be provided with textbook definitions of civil society and governance. For each definition they will then work through the following questions.

1. What parts of the definition are problematic, and how?
2. Where does the definition work, and why?
3. What is missing from the definition?
4. And – ultimately – how useful is the definition with regards to our practice?



Lunch: 12:00pm – 1:00pm

Lunch will be provided.



Short Talks 1: 1:00pm – 2:30pm

Mapping the global context for critical thinking and action on civil society and governance.

This session will be comprised of four short talks (15 minutes each) in which the different speakers help us ‘map’ the context within which our discussions on civil society and governance will be taking place. All the talks will take place in the main hall.

Details of the talks are provided below. After the talks conclude there will be half an hour for questions and discussion.

Speaker	Subject
Michael Edwards (Ford Foundation)	Civil society – the rise of the idea
Vicki Poole (NZAID – New Zealand’s International Development Agency)	International institutions, governance and civil society
Rae Julian (CID – Council for International Development)	International agreements, governance and civil society
Materoa Dodd (Waikato University)	Indigenous peoples, civil society and governance



Afternoon Tea: 2:30pm-3:00pm

Afternoon tea will be held in the Portland restaurant on the ground floor.



Keynote Talk 1: 3:00pm – 4:30pm

Michael Edwards – Civil Society's Impact on Governance; Government's Impact on Civil Society.

Michael Edwards, director of the Ford Foundation’s Civil Society and Governance Unit will provide the first keynote talk of the event. The subject matter will be “Civil Society's Impact on Governance; Government's Impact on Civil Society.” Michael’s talk will be followed by questions and discussion.

Panel Discussion 1: 4:30pm – 5:30pm
Critical Issues in Civil Society and Governance: different perspectives?

This session will be panel discussion in which participants outline what they see as being the key issues on the subject of civil society and governance. The panel discussion will take place in the main hall.

Details of the panellists are provided below.

Panellist
Peter Swain (Volunteer Services Abroad)
Beverly Turnbull (NZAID)
David Robinson (International Centre for Not for Profit Law)
Representative of Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International

Social Engagement: 5:30pm Onwards

You are invited to join us for light snacks and socialising from 5:30pm in the Portland Hotel restaurant (on the ground floor).

Day 2 – November 30

Welcome Coffee: 8:30am – 9:00am

Welcome tea and coffee will be served from 8:30am – 9:00am.

Keynote Talk 2: 9:00am – 10:00am
Dr Kumi Naidoo – the Challenges Faced By Civil Society.

Dr Kumi Naidoo, Secretary General and CEO of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation, will provide the second keynote talk of the event. The subject matter will be the challenges faced by civil society in its work in improving governance. Kumi's talk will be held in the main hall.

Morning Tea: 10:00am-10:30am

Morning tea will be held in the Portland restaurant on the ground floor.

Short Talks 2: 10:30am -11:30am**Narratives – the challenges that confront us in our work.**

This session will be comprised of three talks from three different organisations, each detailing some of the challenges they see in their work with civil society on governance.

Speaker
Narrative 1: Drashna Anjinaiya (Transparency International – Fiji) & Blandine Boulekone (Transparency International – Vanuatu)
Narrative 2: David Green – AusAID (The Australian Government's Overseas Aid Programme).
Narrative 3: Samantha Hung - NZAID

Workshops 2: 11:30am – 12:30pm**The challenges that confront us in our work.**

Following on from the narrative talks, in this workshop the main group will break up into four smaller groups which will then discuss the issues highlighted in the previous talks.

The workshop groups will be as follows:

Workshop Groups		
Group	Facilitator	Location
1	Mary O'Regan	Room 1
2	Jo Spratt	Room 3
3	Andrew McGregor	Room 4
4	Eleanor Doig	Room 5

Participants in these workshops will work through the following key questions:

What issues and challenges stood out in each of the previous presentations (including Kumi Naidoo's keynote speech)?

What further issues do we think are important from our own experience?

Lunch: 12:30pm – 1:30pm

Lunch will be provided.

Panel Discussion 2: 1:30pm – 2:30pm**Putting it into Practice: what can be done to support civil society in promoting better governance?**

This session will be a panel discussion in which participants outline what they believe can be done in supporting civil society in promoting better governance. The panel discussion will take place in the main hall.

Details of the panellists are provided below.

Panellist
Gerard Prinsen (Massey University)
Cameron Cowan (NZAID)
Representative of Oxfam NZ
Jone Dakavula (Citizens' Constitutional Forum Fiji)

Afternoon Tea: 2:30pm-3:00pm

Afternoon tea will be held in the Portland restaurant on the ground floor.

Workshops 3: 3:00pm – 4:30pm **Changing practice – what needs to be done.**

In this workshop the main group will break up into four smaller groups – each group representing a different sector – these groups will then examine what their own sector, and the others present at the symposium, can do to best support civil society in its work on improving governance.

Workshop Groups		
Group	Facilitator	Location
CSO 1	Mary O'Regan	Room 1
CSO 2	Jo Spratt	Room 3
Academic Other	Jacqui Benter-Lynch	Room 4
Donor Agency	TBC	Room 5

The groups will workshop for an hour before reporting back to the main group.

Concluding Talk: Keynote Response. 4:30pm – 5:00pm

In this session keynote speaker Kumi Naidoo will summarise what he sees as being the key issues that have arisen during the two days of the event. He will also offer his thoughts on the way forward.

Event Closing. 5:00pm – 5:30pm

In the final half hour John Overton and Mary O'Regan will close the event.

About our Keynotes

Michael Edwards

Michael Edwards is director of the Governance and Civil Society Unit at the Ford Foundation. Prior to joining the Foundation he was the Senior Civil Society Specialist at the World Bank in Washington DC, where he led a program designed to improve the agency's understanding of, and engagement with, a wide range of civic groups. Before moving to the Bank, Michael spent 15 years as a senior manager in international relief and development NGOs, including periods with Oxfam-UK (as Regional Director for Southern Africa), and Save the Children-UK (as Director of Research, Evaluation and Advocacy). His many books and articles have helped to shape our thinking about NGOs, civil society and international cooperation. He is the author (most recently) of *NGO Rights and Responsibilities: a new deal for global governance* (Foreign Policy Center 2000), *Global Citizen Action* (Lynne Rienner 2001), the *Earthscan Reader on NGO Management* (Earthscan/Stylus 2002), *Civil Society* (Polity Press/Blackwell 2004), and *Future Positive: International Cooperation in the 21st Century* (revised edition, Earthscan/Stylus 2004).

Dr Kumi Naidoo

Dr Kumi Naidoo chairs the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP) and has been Secretary General and Chief Executive Officer of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Civic Participation since 1998. Since its launch in 2005, GCAP has grown into a global coalition of anti-poverty campaigners from over 100 countries, including New Zealand's own Make Poverty History Campaign. CIVICUS is an alliance of over 500 civil society organizations, networks, and individuals in more than 100 countries, which is dedicated to strengthening citizen and civil society action throughout the world.

Kumi Naidoo was born in South Africa and was actively involved in the struggle against apartheid from the age of 15. In 1986, Kumi was arrested and charged for violating the state of emergency regulations in South Africa. Upon his release from prison, Kumi was subject to persistent police harassment and went underground for one year before finally deciding to live in exile in England until 1989. During this time, Kumi was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University and earned a doctorate in political sociology. After Nelson Mandela's release from prison in 1990, Kumi returned to South Africa and has worked on a wide range of issues including the legalization of the African National Congress (ANC) as a political party, acting as official spokesperson of the Independent Electoral Commission, and working as Executive Director of the National Literacy Cooperation of South Africa. Kumi is an active advocate for gender equity and against gender violence, and organised the National Men's March Against Violence on Women and Children in 1997.

About the Venue

The symposium is being held in the conference facilities on the first floor of the Kingsgate Hotel Portland.

The hotel's address is:

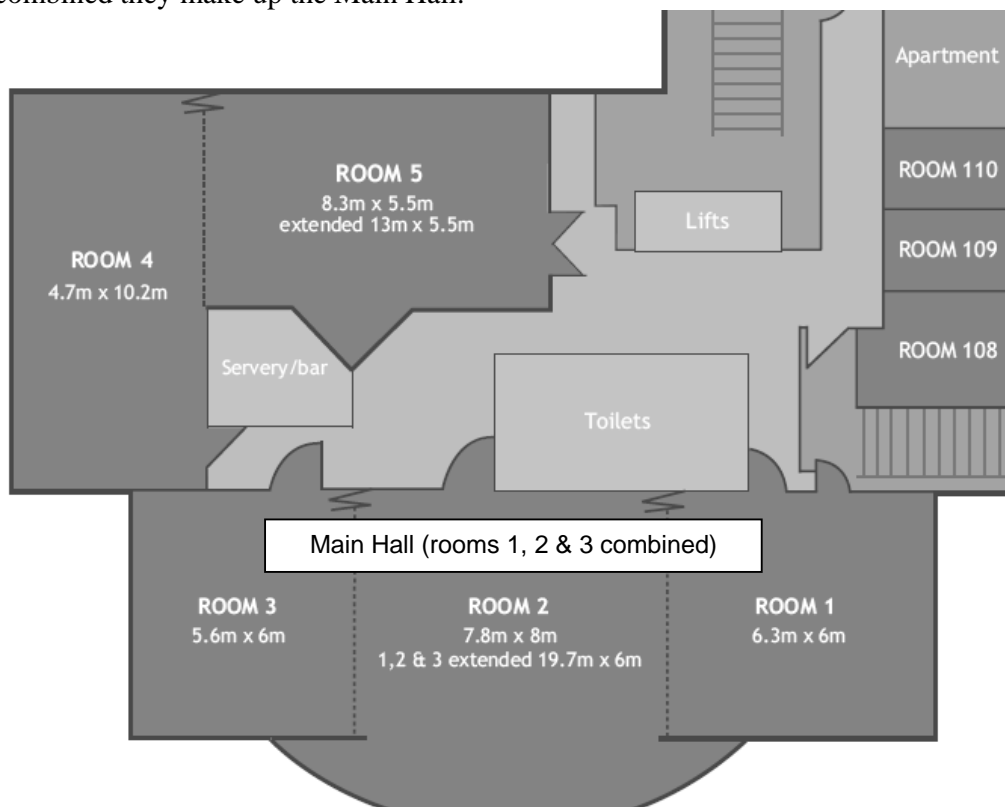
**24 Hawkestone Street
Thorndon
Wellington**

There is a map of Wellington on the next page, which shows where the hotel is located.

The hotel has Internet facilities on the ground floor (pay per use). It also has a pay per use wireless network, which you can connect your laptop to. The hotel has a restaurant and bar on the ground floor.

The hotel also has some limited off-street parking which symposium participants can use (you will need to register your car at the front desk). There is also coupon parking (where you pay to purchase a coupon which allows you to park) in the streets around the hotel. However, parking is limited and you may find it easiest to take public transport to and from the hotel. (Information on public transport is included in the next section).

Below is a floor plan for the conference facilities at the Portland. Please refer to these room numbers when looking for your workshop room. When rooms 1, 2 & 3 are combined they make up the Main Hall.





PORTLAND

Hotel of Thorndon



PortLand Hotel

Wellington City Services & Attractions

1. Basin Reserve
2. Botanic Gardens
3. Bus & Coach Terminal
4. Cable Car
5. Carter Observatory
6. Wellington Railway Station
7. Civic Square
8. Eastbourne Ferry
9. Ferry Shuttle Bus
10. Interisland Terminal
11. Katherine Mansfield Birthplace
12. Museum of Wellington
13. Wellington Festival & Convention Centre
14. Mt Victoria Lookout
15. National Archives
16. National Library
17. Te Papa - Museum of New Zealand
18. Westpac Trust Stadium
19. Old St Paul's Cathedral
20. Parliament Buildings
21. Queens Wharf Retail & Events Centre
22. Rose Gardens & Begonia House
23. City Gallery
24. Visitor Information Centre
25. Wellington Cathedral
26. Bats Theatre
27. Circa Theatre
28. Downstage Theatre
29. St James Theatre
30. State Opera House

Public Toilets

Car Parking

To Wellington Airport

Railway Station

One Way Streets

To Wellington Hospital

To Karori Wildlife Sanctuary

To Wellington Zoo

Wellington Visitor Centre
Corner of Victoria and Wakefield Streets,
in Civic Square,
Tel: +64 4 802 4860
info@WellingtonNZ.com

About Wellington

Getting to the Kingsgate Hotel Portland

The Kingsgate Hotel Portland can be found by driving or walking up Molesworth Street and then turning left onto Hawkestone Street. It is 10 minute's walk (up Molesworth Street) from Wellington's central bus and train terminal.

From the centre of town (Courtney Place) the Number 14 Bus (Silver Route) runs along Molesworth Street and will get you within 2 minutes walk of the hotel. You need to get off at the New World supermarket bus stop – from there you can walk up Hawkestone Street. Make sure you get off the bus at this stop though. If you do not, you will probably end up on the motorway.

For public transport information and times see: <http://www.metlink.org.nz>

From Wellington airport you can expect to pay about NZ\$40 to get to the Portland in a taxi.

The same journey will cost you about NZ\$18 in a shuttle van. You can also catch the 'Flyer' bus from the airport to the railway station then walk up Molesworth Street to the hotel. Please note that the railway station is not a particularly safe part of Wellington after dark.

Should you need to take a taxi within the city at all, Wellington Combined Taxis are a reputable taxi firm. Their phone number is: 04 384 4444. Their website is: <http://www.taxis.co.nz/>

Eating Out

The Portland Hotel has its own restaurant. Also, 5 minutes walk from the Portland, on Molesworth Street (34 Molesworth), is the Backbencher Pub. It has reasonable food and a pleasant atmosphere. It's just over the road from parliament and is famed for its not entirely flattering sculptures and cartoons of New Zealand politicians. <http://www.backbencher.co.nz/backbencher/index.html>

Numerous other restaurants can be found along Cuba Street and Courtney place (the other side of the CBD from the Portland). Getting there takes about 5 minutes in a cab.

For a guide to Wellington restaurants see: www.wellingtondining.co.nz

If you want to find out what else is on in Wellington see: <http://www.feelinggreat.co.nz/events/>

There is a New World supermarket very close to the hotel. To get there walk to the intersection of Hawkestone and Molesworth streets. The supermarket is about 20 meters to the left of the intersection.

About Civil Society

Written by Terence Wood: *Dev-Zone Programme, The Development Resource Centre.*

Disclaimer: The following document does not reflect the beliefs of the symposium organisers or the organisations they work for. It is intended only as an outline of some of the arguments that are commonly made in discussions on civil society and governance.

The idea that civil society has a key role to play in improving governance in developing countries has risen to prominence in recent years. The influential United Nations Millennium Project Report, *Investing In Development*, for example, claims that, “strong civil society engagement and participation are crucial to effective governance”.ⁱ While a major AusAID report on good governance states that, “good governance requires a strong and pluralistic civil society, where there is freedom of expression and association.”ⁱⁱ

Such claims have a sound basis in political science,ⁱⁱⁱ and it is easy to find examples of civil society improving governance. But, at the same time, as is so often the case in development, the reality on the ground is complex and key questions remain unresolved. Strong civil society is certainly a force for better governance in some instances, but is this always the case? And what about government’s impact on civil society? Is it realistic to expect civil society to function effectively when governance is poor and governments repressive? There are also numerous practical questions associated with how we, as development actors, interact with civil society in developing countries. How can we best strengthen civil society? Can we, in fact, act to strengthen civil society at all? Or is a vibrant civil society something that has to develop from within?

These are just some of the issues we hope to examine at the *DevNet-NZAID Symposium on Civil Society and Governance*. To help this happen, this document has been designed to give you some brief background on the subject of civil society and civil society’s relationship with improved governance. The background starts by discussing definitions of civil society. It then outlines some of the main arguments made as to why civil society ought to be expected to improve governance. This is then followed by some ‘counter arguments’ or explanations of why the relationship between civil society and good governance can be more complicated than one might initially expect.

This background isn’t intended to be the final word on the issue of civil society and governance – rather it is intended to be a potential starting point for your thinking around the issue.

One point that is worth noting upfront is that – reflecting the dominance that has been afforded to western political thought in development discourse on civil society and governance – this background limits itself to western conceptualisations of civil society and governance. There are, however, alternative formulations of these ideas stemming from other cultural and philosophical positions. In the lead up to the symposium you may well wish to consider whether the western model is the most appropriate for the work you do.

Civil Society Defined

On their website, the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics (LSE) provides what might be described as a ‘textbook’ definition of civil society:

Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.^{iv}

In this definition civil society is an ‘arena’, or socio-political space, populated by organisations (either formal or informal).

There are four key elements of the LSE definition that ought to be emphasised:

1. Collective action: civil society involves people acting collectively as opposed to on their own.
2. The absence of coercion: individuals ought to be able to join or leave civil society organisations of their own free will.
3. Distinct: civil society is – theoretically, at least – distinct from government, family, and the market (private firms and enterprises).
4. Blurred boundaries: while it is easy to think of organisations that undoubtedly fall within the space defined above, there are numerous others where the case may not be quite so clear cut. Some church groups, for example, may exert considerable pressure on their members not to leave. Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) may receive almost all of their funding from the government and may be contracted to perform tasks that, in other countries, are normally associated with the state. This doesn't mean that these churches or NGOs are not part of civil society just that, as the definition says, the boundaries between civil society, markets and the state are inevitably blurred.

Stemming from such standard definitions of civil society is a related term commonly used in discussions of development: Civil Society Organisation (CSO). This term is used to refer to organisations that meet the criteria outlined above and which are to be found within the ‘arena’ of civil society.

The London School of Economics’ definition of civil society is not the only one, of course. Nor is it uncontested. Some authors include in their definition of civil society social processes such as traditional systems of reciprocity^v while others argue for the inclusion of the private sector.^{vi} Some authors go further still, arguing for dramatically different definitions.

Michael Edwards, one of the keynote speakers at this event, while not contesting standard definitions like the LSE one above, argues that on their own they are insufficient for a proper understanding of the interaction between collective action

and healthy politics. In his book 'Civil Society' Edwards argues that the definitions like that provided by the LSE ought to be augmented by two additional complimentary meanings of the term. These are:

1. Civil society as the good society: A definition where the term civil society becomes description of the sort of societies we hope to obtain – societies which are *civil*. That is, societies that provide for the security and material needs of their citizens while offering them space for active social and political participation.
2. Civil society as the public sphere: In this definition civil society is synonymous with the public sphere – the home of all our collective interaction. Interacting within the public sphere we find, not only CSOs, but also individuals, business, the government and other organisations. The public sphere is the venue for our day-to-day political interactions – for voting, for discussion, for debates, for demonstrations. A healthy public sphere will be characterised by strong information flows, opportunities for participation for all citizens, and deliberation – as opposed to conflict and polarisation.^{vii}

For Edwards the three definitions complement each other: CSOs are necessary for well-governed societies, but at the same time, we need to 'keep our eyes on the prize' – we don't aim to strengthen CSOs because that is a good thing of its own accord, but rather because of what it can do for us in creating a civil society. Similarly, CSOs contribute to a healthy public sphere, but they are not the only necessary ingredient. And when the public sphere is dysfunctional CSOs may struggle to operate, or may become actively destructive.

For the purposes of expediency, over the rest of this document I am going to work from the 'textbook' definition of civil society (the LSE one provided above). However, just because this is the definition that is most frequently used doesn't mean that it is the definition that will be most useful to you. Indeed, in the first session of the symposium we are going to discuss the definitions of 'civil society' and 'governance'. As you read over the rest of this section you might want to consider whether some of the dilemmas outlined could be avoided if we used a different definition of civil society; or, perhaps even, if we were to replace the term with others more specific and more tailored to the work we are doing.

Better Governance through Civil Society

A variety of distinct but interrelated roles are commonly identified for civil society in bringing about better governance. Below I detail four of these.

Civil Society as a Countervailing Force

According to proponents of this argument, an active civil society is necessary to counter-balance monopolisation of political power by private interests. In market economies, the argument runs, some form of economic inequality is inevitable, and with economic inequality comes political inequality: people and businesses with more wealth are provided with the means to exert considerably more influence over the political process than ordinary citizens. They can access the media and, through it, public opinion. They can buy political influence with campaign funding and potentially even bribes. They can hire lawyers to contest legislation they don't like, and lobbyists to pressure for legislation they do.

Against this, average citizens acting on their own may be powerless. However, when citizens act collectively, as part of civil society, they can amplify their individual voices.^{viii} They can pool resources to hire lawyers and lobbyists of their own. They can stage protests to attract public attention. They can pressure politicians through the force of their numbers. In short, they can act as a counterbalance to other influences which may distort the political process and lead to poor governance.

Civil Society as a 'Watchdog' on Government

A closely related argument is that civil society is essential for good governance through its role as a watchdog on government itself. According to this argument, the collective weight of civil society can act as a check on governments that act to abuse the power bestowed upon them.^{ix} Civil society's role as a watchdog on government can take many different forms: civil society can expose and resist corrupt government officials; it can publicise and protest human rights abuses; it can take action against unpopular laws. It can also lobby governments for public goods and social services.

As with the previous argument, civil society's key asset in its role as a watchdog is its collective nature – individuals on their own can campaign against the government, but when they work together and pool resources they will normally have much more impact.

In both the 'countervailing force' and 'watchdog' arguments the point is often made that the power of collective action is most significant for the poor and vulnerable, and those who have been marginalised from formal political processes. Unless these groups act collectively they may have almost no voice in the political sphere.

Associational Life

The third common argument made for civil society's role in fostering good governance is distinctly different from the other two. This argument focuses not on civil society's direct influence on politics and policies, but rather its indirect impact on the political sphere through what it (civil society) does to us as citizens. According to proponents of this theory, a strong and active civil society instils in its members, "habits of cooperation and public spiritedness, as well as the practical skills necessary to partake in public life".^x In addition to this, it is argued that civil society organisations can encourage reciprocity and foster greater social trust by providing us with spaces where we interact with those who are not just our immediate neighbours and family, and a manner which is not solely driven by our own self-interest. All of these citizen attributes (trust, reciprocity, etc) are considered essential to well functioning democracies.

One point about this third theory that is important to note is that, to its advocates, all CSOs are important, not just those that are directly political. To proponents of this theory, a sports league can do as much to incubate good citizens as an advocacy NGO.

Complicating Factors

Each of the above arguments for civil society's role in improved governance is intuitive and it is easy to think of examples which may serve as evidence of their validity. However, there are also good reasons to believe that the relationship between civil society and governance may be more complicated than it initially appears.

Civil Society and Un-Civil Society

When one thinks about the LSE definition of civil society for any length of time it becomes apparent that a vast array of different organisations meet the criteria specified, and that there is no reason to think that they will all have the same objectives (consider the differing views of ‘pro-choice’ and ‘pro-life’ CSOs on the issue of abortion); or that their objectives may necessarily be conducive to good governance at all. The often-cited example of a civil society organisation with a harmful impact on governance is the Ku Klux Klan (KKK).^{xi} Under many definitions of civil society the KKK would count as a CSO, yet its influence on governance has been profoundly negative. It has intimidated citizens and politicians, and at times been actively violent – all in the name of the political and economic disenfranchisement of a significant section of the population of the United States. Similarly, the notorious Rwandan Interahamwe would meet some definitions of a CSO, yet it was an agent of genocide rather than good governance.

It is also possible to think of less extreme cases where CSOs may impede rather than assist good governance. Business associations may lobby against the interests of the poor and marginal, while competing interest groups (particularly when they are focused around existing societal fault lines such as religion or race) may foster mistrust rather than trust. It is even possible that perfectly laudable CSOs may end up distorting the political process if they manage to capture too large slice of the political sphere.

CSOs and the Power of the State

When discussing the impact that CSOs can have on governments and governance it is important to remember that influence flows both ways. Through the laws they make, the money they spend, and the social environment they create, governments can exert immense influence on civil society. One need look no further than the ongoing arrest and harassment of civil society activists in Fiji for an example of this. Fiji, unfortunately, is not unique. CIVICUS (the CSO of which, Kumi Naidoo, our other keynote speaker, is director general) runs a programme called Civil Society Watch, which exists to monitor and respond to threats to CSOs around the world. The most recent issue of their monthly newsletter details legal repression of CSOs in Palestine, violent government crackdowns on civil society protesters in Burma, the government closure of a human rights group in Egypt, the murder of the children of human rights activists in Guatemala, the arrest of activists in Zimbabwe and numerous other cases of governments denying CSOs and CSO members their basic rights.^{xii}

Less overtly, governments can impact on civil society through a myriad of legal means, including how they define charitable status and the extent of the bureaucracy that CSOs need to work within. Also, governments may often fund CSOs to provide social and other services. This, in turn, can bring with it potential influence.

At the very least, the fact that governments can exert so much influence over civil society ought to challenge simple assumptions about better governance being directly brought about by strengthening civil society.

Cultural Context

A third issue which may complicate assumptions about civil society’s role in improving governance has to do with the cultural applicability of the concept. The idea of civil society, at least in relation to standard definitions of the term, stems primarily from European and North American political thought and is strongly connected to the social, political and economic arrangements of these parts of the

world. In particular, it relates to a system where there is space between the state, the market and families for civil society to form. In some parts of the world it is questionable to what extent this same space actually exists. Consider, for example, a small village society which is strongly dominated by family ties and traditional governance systems. Is it actually possible for civil society (particularly the western model of civil society that has been outlined in this document) to function, or to be effective, in a cultural environment like this? At the very least, in some parts of the world, the nature and make up of civil society may be very different from that which we are familiar with. In some countries civil society may be limited almost exclusively to faith-based organisations such as churches and mosques. Such organisations might still have an important role to play in better governance but it may be a distinctly different role from that which we associate with NGOs or even sports leagues.^{xiii} It is also possible that in different cultural environments the favourable influence on governance which civil society arguably provides may be achieved through other social processes altogether.

Looking Ahead

Having noted all these complicating factors it is important to emphasise that none of them necessarily negate the hypothesis that civil society has an important role to play in improving governance. Just because some CSOs may have a negative impact on governance does not mean that others do not play a positive and essential role in bringing about better government. Similarly, while civil society may struggle under repressive governments, numerous CSOs do still exist in such environments and often achieve much (sometimes even the end of repressive regimes). And, finally, while civil society can be argued to be a concept born of western political and economic conditions, CSOs now exist in almost every country on earth and, while some may have different forms from those that we are familiar with, this does not necessarily mean that they have no role to play in improving governance. More than anything else, these complicating factors illustrate the need for careful consideration of civil society and what it can do to improve governance, which is precisely what we hope to engage in over the two days of our event.

ⁱ UN Millennium Project. 2005, *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals (Overview)*, Earthscan, London, 16.

ⁱⁱ AusAID, 2000. *Good Governance: Guiding Principles for Implementation*, Accessed online at: http://www.ausaid.gov.au/publications/pdf/good_governance.pdf, 3

ⁱⁱⁱ For example: R. Putnam, R. Leonardi & R. Nanetti, 1994. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey

^{iv} London School of Economics, n.d. *What is Civil Society?*, Accessed online at: http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm

^v For example: P.M Swain. 1999. *Civil Society and Development: Pacific Island Case Studies*, Unpublished PhD. Dissertation, Massey University.

^{vi} M. Edwards. 2004, *Civil Society*, Polity Press, Cambridge

^{vii} *Ibid.*

^{viii} R. Putnam. 2000, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon & Schuster, New York.

^{ix} *Ibid.*

^x *Ibid.*

^{xi} *Ibid.*

^{xii} CIVICUS. 2007, *Civil Society Watch Monthly Bulletin – September 2007*, Accessed online at: http://www.civicus.org/new/content/CSWMB_September_No28.htm

^{xiii} For some useful case studies of civil society operating in different cultural environments see: M Ottaway & Carothers T (eds), 2000, *Funding Virtue: civil society and democracy promotion*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington.